My Favorite Story

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ALBIN

FANNIE HURST

FOREWORD

THE story I like best seldom plays more than a one-night stand in my preferences.

For an ephemeral moment after the completion of a manuscript I experience a thrill of exultation which goes out almost immediately, like a snuffed candle.

Therefore the last story from my pen goes through a brief stage of being the one I like best and then slides into the limbo of foster children for whom I no longer entertain interest or affection.

I may say, that it is the yet-unwritten story which is actually the one I like best. The elusive one just ahead of my present achievement, with which somehow, I never catch up.

The following is doubtless a peculiarity I share with many authors. It is almost impossible for me to take up and re-read already published material of mine without an actual sickness and torture of spirit.

I am a sort of Miss Lot. I dare not look back, only ahead.

In attempting to select for purposes of this collection, I tried the bitter test of re-reading some of my stories.

I have concluded that one of the stories I like best (a few of them sort of ran neck-and-neck) and that seems to wear well in re-reading is "Humoresque."

The glamour around the impulse that led to the doing of that story is with me again.

It is almost the only story I ever wrote which I can trace back to the moment of its inception.

I was attending a Sunday concert at the New York

Hippodrome several years ago and because the house was sold out, I was able to get a chair only on the stage, so that the young violinist of the evening appeared and played with his back to me. From where I was seated I faced the enormous amphitheater which was a great bowl of human faces that reached, in complete circle, the ceiling. An expectant, music-hungry, popular-priced audience eager for the treat the evening was sure to hold.

From my point of vantage, there appeared suddenly in the wings, the young boy violinist whose fame at twenty-five had already swung around the world. He entered that shadowy aisle that led off the stage, like a pale, disembodied spirit, his face and hands and white shirt-front seeming to float in gloom. A row of figures followed him. A short, stout, perspiring man of about fifty with excited, near-sighted eyes behind high-powered spectacles and carrying in his arms tenderly what might have been an infant in swaddling clothes.

Behind this man, who was evidently the father, the pale, timid face of a woman with gray hair in a neat, unelaborate dress and dry, bright, nervous eyes peered over his shoulder. Then came, in steps, the peering, curious, prideful faces of three or four young people, brothers and sisters no doubt to the young genius at the head of the group.

At a signal from the leader of the orchestra, the father began unwrapping the object which he held in his arms, removing fold after fold of silk. At last the violin was revealed and the young soloist, taking it from his father, stepped on the platform and for two hours, by the whining, crashing, tremulous, crying,

laughing, lilting rhythm of that instrument, kept his vast audience spell-bound by his torrential genius.

Meanwhile, there stood huddled in the wings like flames, like so many candles burning their adoration of genius, the father, the timid-faced mother, the young brothers and sisters.

At the conclusion of the concert, while the audience still bombarded its applause, the father took the instrument from his nerveless and exhausted son and wrapping it once more in its silk swaddlings, the group with the young violinist its central figure, disappeared into black shadows.

It was then and there, out of the incomparable beauty of the music, the dim, enchanted faces of that mother and father, and the spellbound audience, clamoring for more, that the idea for "Humoresque" was born.

HUMORESQUE

By Fannie Hurst

On either side of the Bowery, which cuts through like a drain to catch its sewage, Every Man's Land, a reeking march of humanity and humidity, steams with the excrement of seventeen languages, flung in *patois* from tenement windows, fire-escapes, curbs, stoops, and cellars whose walls are terrible and spongy with fungi.

By that impregnable chemistry of race whereby the red blood of the Mongolian and the red blood of the Caucasian become as oil and water in the mingling, Mulberry Street, bounded by sixteen languages, runs its intact Latin length of push-carts, clothes-lines, naked babies, drying vermicelli; black-eyed women in rhinestone combs and perennially big with child; whole families of buttonhole-makers, who first saw the blue-and-gold light of Sorrento, bent at home work round a single gas flare; pomaded barbers of a thousand Neapolitan amours. And

From Fannie Hurst's Humoresque. Copyright 1919, 1920, by Harper & Brothers. By permission of the publishers.

then, just as suddenly, almost without osmosis and by the mere stepping down from the curb, Mulberry becomes Mott Street, hung in grill-work balconies, the moldy smell of poverty touched up with incense. Orientals whose feet shuffle and whose faces are carved out of satinwood. Forbidden women, their white, drugged faces behind upper windows. Yellow children, incongruous enough in Western clothing. A draughty areaway with an oblique of gaslight and a black well of descending staircase. Show-windows of jade and tea and Chinese porcelains.

More streets emanating out from Mott like a handful of crooked rheumatic fingers, then suddenly the Bowery again, cowering beneath Elevated trains, where men burned down to the butt end of soiled lives pass in and out and out and in of the knee-high swinging doors, a veiny-nosed, acid-eaten race in themselves.

Allen Street, too, still more easterly, and half as wide, is straddled its entire width by the steely, long-legged skeleton of Elevated traffic, so that its third-floor windows no sooner shudder into silence from the rushing shock of one train than they are shaken into chatter by the passage of another. Indeed, third-floor dwellers of Allen Street, reaching out, can almost touch the serrated edges of the Elevated structure, and in summer the smell of its hot rails

becomes an actual taste in the mouth. Passengers, in turn, look in upon this horizontal of life as they whiz by. Once, in fact, the blurry figure of what might have been a woman leaned out, as she passed, to toss into one Abrahm Kantor's apartment a short-stemmed pink carnation. It hit softly on little Leon Kantor's crib, brushing him fragrantly across the mouth and causing him to pucker up.

Beneath, where even in August noonday, the sun cannot find its way by a chink, and babies lie stark naked in the cavernous shade, Allen Street presents a sort of submarine and greenish gloom, as if its humanity were actually moving through a sea of aqueous shadows, faces rather bleached and shrunk from sunlessness as water can bleach and shrink. And then, like a shimmering background of orange-finned and copper-flanked marine life, the brass-shops of Allen Street, whole rows of them, burn flamelessly and without benefit of fuel.

To enter Abrahm Kantor's—Brasses, was three steps down, so that his casement show-window, at best filmed over with the constant rain of dust ground down from the rails above, was obscure enough, but crammed with copied loot of khedive and of czar. The seven-branch candlestick so biblical and supplicating of arms. An urn, shaped like Rebecca's, of brass, all beaten over with little pocks. Things—cups,

trays, knockers, ikons, gargoyles, bowls, and teapots. A symphony of bells in graduated sizes. Jardinières with fat sides. A pot-bellied samovar. A swinging-lamp for the dead, star-shaped. Against the door, an octave of tubular chimes, prisms of voiceless harmony and of heatless light.

Opening this door, they rang gently, like melody heard through water and behind glass. Another bell rang, too, in tilted singsong from a pulley operating somewhere in the catacomb rear of this lambent vale of things and things and things. In turn, this pulley set in toll still another bell, two flights up in Abrahm Kantor's tenement, which overlooked the front of whizzing rails and a rear wilderness of gibbet-looking clothes-lines, dangling perpetual specters of flapping union suits in a mid air flaky with soot.

Often at lunch, or even the evening meal, this bell would ring in on Abrahm Kantor's digestive well-being, and while he hurried down, napkin often bib-fashion still about his neck, and into the smoldering lanes of copper, would leave an eloquent void at the head of his well-surrounded table.

This bell was ringing now, jingling in upon the slumber of a still newer Kantor, snuggling peacefully enough within the ammoniac depths

of a cradle recently evacuated by Leon, heretofore impinged upon you.

On her knees before an oven that billowed forth hotly into her face, Mrs. Kantor, fairly fat and not yet forty, and at the immemorial task of plumbing a delicately swelling layer-cake with broom-straw, raised her face, reddened and faintly moist.

"Isadore, run down and say your papa is out until six. If it's a customer, remember the first asking-price is the two middle figures on the tag, and the last asking-price is the two outside figures. See once, with your papa out to buy your little brother his birthday present, and your mother in a cake, if you can't make a sale for first price."

Isadore Kantor, aged eleven and hunched with a younger Kantor over an oilcloth-covered table, hunched himself still deeper in a barter for a large crystal marble with a candy stripe down its center.

"Izzie, did you hear me?"

"Yes'm."

"Go down this minute—do you hear? Rudolph, stop always letting your big brother get the best of you in marbles. Iz-zie!"

"In-a-minute."

"Don't let me have to ask you again, Isadore Kantor!"

"Aw, ma, I got some 'rithmetic to do. Let Esther go!"

"Always Esther! Your sister stays right in the front room with her spelling."

"Aw, ma, I got spelling, too."

"Every time I ask that boy he should do me one thing, right away he gets lessons! With me, that lessons-talk don't go no more. Every time you get put down in school, I'm surprised there's a place left lower where they can put you. Working-papers for such a boy like you!"

"I'll woik—"

"How I worried myself! Violin lessons yet —thirty cents a lesson out of your papa's pants while he slept! That's how I wanted to have in the family a profession—maybe a musician on the violin! Lessons for you out of money I had to lie to your papa about! Honest, when I think of it—my own husband—it's a wonder I don't potch you just for remembering it. Rudolph, will you stop licking that cake-pan? It's saved for your little brother Leon. Ain't you ashamed even on your little brother's birthday to steal from him?"

"Ma, gimme the spoon?"

"I'll give you the spoon, Isadore Kantor, where you don't want it. If you don't hurry down, the way that bell is ringing, not one bite

do you get out of your little brother's birthday-cake tonight!"

"I'm goin', ain't I?"

"Always on my children's birthdays a meanness sets into this house! Ru-dolph, will you put down that bowl! Iz-zie—for the last time I ask you—for the last time——"

Erect now, Mrs. Kantor lifted an expressive hand, letting it hover.

"I'm goin', ma; for golly sakes, I'm goin'!" said her recalcitrant one, shuffling off toward the staircase, shuffling, shuffling.

Then Mrs. Kantor resumed her plumbing, and through the little apartment, its middle and only bedroom of three beds and a crib lighted vicariously by the front room and kitchen, began to wind the warm, the golden-brown fragrance of cake in the rising.

By six o'clock the shades were drawn against the dirty dusk of Allen Street and the oilcloth-covered table dragged out center and spread by Esther Kantor, nine in years, in the sturdy little legs bulging over shoe-tops, in the pink cheeks that sagged slightly of plumpness, and in the utter roundness of face and gaze, but mysteriously older in the little-mother lore of crib and knee-dandling ditties and in the ropy length and thickness of the two brown plaits down her back.

There was an eloquence to that waiting, laid-

out table, the print of the family already gathered about it; the dynastic high chair, throne of each succeeding Kantor; an armchair drawn up before the paternal mustache-cup; the ordinary kitchen chair of Mannie Kantor, who spilled things, an oilcloth sort of bib dangling from its back; the little chair of Leon Kantor, cushioned in an old family album that raised his chin above the table. Even in cutlery the Kantor family was not lacking in variety. Surrounding a centerpiece of thick Russian lace were Russian spoons washed in washed-off gilt; forks of one, two, and three tines; steel knives with black handles; a hartshorn carving-knife. Thick-lipped china in stacks before the armchair. A round four-pound loaf of black bread waiting to be torn, and tonight, on the festive mat of cotton lace, a cake of pinkly gleaming icing, encircled with five pink little candles.

At slightly after six Abrahm Kantor returned, leading by a resisting wrist Leon Kantor, his stemlike little legs hit midship, as it were, by not sufficiently cut-down trousers, and so narrow and birdlike of face that his eyes quite obliterated the remaining map of his features, like those of a still wet nestling. All except his ears. They poised at the sides of Leon's shaved head of black bristles, as if butterflies had just lighted there, whispering, with very spread wings, their message, and pres-

ently would fly off again. By some sort of muscular contraction he could wiggle these ears at will, and would do so for a penny or a whistle, and upon one occasion for his brother Rudolph's dead rat, so devised as to dangle from string and window before the unhappy passer-by. They were quivering now, these ears, but because the entire little face was twitching back tears and gulp of sobs.

"Abrahm—Leon—what is it?" Her hands and her forearms instantly out from the business of kneading something meaty and floury, Mrs. Kantor rushed forward, her glance quick from one to the other of them. "Abrahm, what's wrong?"

"I'll feedle him! I'll feedle him!"

The little pulling wrist still in clutch, Mr. Kantor regarded his wife, the lower half of his face, well covered with reddish bristles, undershot, his free hand and even his eyes violently lifted. To those who see in a man a perpetual kinship to that animal kingdom of which he is supreme, there was something undeniably anthropoidal about Abrahm Kantor, a certain simian width between the eyes and long, rather agile hands with hairy backs.

"Hush it!" cried Mr. Kantor, his free hand raised in threat of descent, and cowering his small son to still more undersized proportions. "Hush it or, by golly! I'll——"

"Abrahm—Abrahm—what is it?"

Then Mr. Kantor gave vent in acridity of word and feature.

"Schlemmil!" he cried. *"Momser! Ganef! Nebich!"* by which, in smiting mother tongue, he branded his offspring with attributes of apostate and ne'er-do-well, of idiot and thief.

"Abrahm!"

"Schlemmil!" repeated Mr. Kantor, swinging Leon so that he described a large semicircle that landed him into the meaty and waiting embrace of his mother. "Take him! You should be proud of such a little *momser* for a son! Take him, and here you got back his birthday dollar. A feedle! Honest—when I think on it—a feedle!"

Such a rush of outrage seemed fairly to strangle Mr. Kantor that he stood, hand still upraised, choking and inarticulate above the now frankly howling huddle of his son.

"Abrahm, you should just once touch this child! How he trembles! Leon—mamma's baby—what is it? Is this how you come back when papa takes you out to buy your birthday present? Ain't you ashamed?"

Mouth distended to a large and blackly hollow O, Leon, between terrifying spells of breath-holding, continued to howl.

"All the way to Naftel's toy-store I drag him. A birthday present for a dollar his

mother wants he should have, all right, a birthday present! I give you my word till I'm ashamed for Naftel, every toy in his shelves is pulled down. Such a cow—that shakes with his head——"

"No—no—no!" This from young Leon, beating at his mother's skirts.

Again the upraised but never quite descending hand of his father.

"By golly! I'll 'no—no' you!"

"Abrahm—go 'way! Baby, what did papa do?"

Then Mr. Kantor broke into an actual tarantella of rage, his hands palms up and dancing.

" 'What did papa do?' she asks. She's got easy asking. 'What did papa do?' The whole shop, I tell you. A sheep with a baa inside when you squeeze on him—games—a horn so he can holler my head off—such a knife like Izzie's with a scissors in it. 'Leon,' I said, ashamed for Naftel, 'that's a fine knife like Izzie's so you can cut up with. All right, then' —when I see how he hollers—'such a box full of soldiers to have war with.' 'Dollar seventy-five,' says Naftel. 'All right, then,' I says, when I seen how he keeps hollering. 'Give you a dollar fifteen for 'em.' I should make myself small for fifteen cents more. 'Dollar fifteen,' I says—anything so he should shut up

with his hollering for what he seen in the window."

"He seen something in the window he wanted, Abrahm?"

"Didn't I tell you? A feedle! A four-dollar feedle! A moosicer, so we should have another feedler in the family for some thirty-cents lessons."

"Abrahm—you mean — he — our Leon—wanted a violin?"

" 'Wanted,' she says. I could potch him again this minute for how he wanted it! *Du*—you little bum you—*chammer—momser—I'll* feedle you!"

Across Mrs. Kantor's face, as she knelt there in the shapeless cotton-stuff uniform of poverty, through the very tenement of her body, a light had flashed up into her eyes. She drew her son closer, crushing his puny cheek up against hers, cupping his bristly little head in her by no means immaculate palms.

"He wanted a violin! It's come, Abrahm! The dream of all my life—my prayers—it's come! I knew it must be one of my children if I waited long enough—and prayed enough. A musician! He wants a violin! He cried for a violin! My baby! Why, darlink, mamma'll sell her clothes off her back to get you a violin. He's a musician, Abrahm! I should have

known it the way he's fooling always around the chimes and the bells in the store!"

Then Mr. Kantor took to rocking his head between his palms.

"Oi—oi! The mother is crazier as her son. A moosician! A *fresser,* you mean. Such an eater, it's a wonder he ain't twice too big instead of twice too little for his age."

"That's a sign, Abrahm; geniuses, they all eat big. For all we know, he's a genius. I swear to you, Abrahm, all the months before he was born I prayed for it. Each one before they came, I prayed it should be the one. I thought that time the way our Isadore ran after the organ-grinder he would be the one. How could I know it was the monkey he wanted? When Isadore wouldn't take to it I prayed my next one, and then my next one, should have the talent. I've prayed for it, Abrahm. If he wants a violin, please, he should have it."

"Not with my money."

"With mine. I've got enough saved, Abrahm. Them three extra dollars right here inside my own waist. Just that much for that cape down on Grand Street. I wouldn't have it now, the way they say the wind blows up them——"

"I tell you the woman's crazy——"

"I feel it! I know he's got talent! I know my children so well. A—a father don't un-

derstand. I'm so next to them. It's like I can tell always everything that will happen to them —it's like a pain—somewheres here—like in back of my heart."

"A pain in the heart she gets."

"For my own children I'm always a prophet, I tell you! You think I didn't know that—that terrible night after the pogrom after we got out of Kief to across the border! You remember, Abrahm, how I predicted it to you then—how our Mannie would be born too soon and—and not right from my suffering! Did it happen on the ship to America just the way I said it would? Did it happen just exactly how I predicted Izzie would break his leg that time playing on the fire-escape? I tell you, Abrahm, I get a real pain here under my heart that tells me what comes to my children. Didn't I tell you how Esther would be the first in her confirmation-class and our baby Boris would be red-headed? At only five years, our Leon all by himself cries for a fiddle—get it for him, Abrahm—get it for him!"

"I tell you, Sarah, I got a crazy woman for a wife! It ain't enough we celebrate eight birthdays a year with one-dollar presents each time and copper goods every day higher. It ain't enough that right tomorrow I got a fifty-dollar note over me from Sol Ginsberg; a four-

dollar present she wants for a child that don't even know the name of a feedle."

"Leon, baby, stop hollering. Papa will go back and get the fiddle for you now before supper. See, mamma's got money here in her waist——"

"Papa will go back for the feedle *not*—three dollars she's saved for herself he can holler out of her for a feedle!"

"Abrahm, he's screaming so he—he'll have a fit."

"He should have two fits."

"Darlink——"

"I tell you the way you spoil your children it will some day come back on us."

"It's his birthday night, Abrahm—five years since his little head first lay on the pillow next to me."

"All right—all right—drive me crazy because he's got a birthday."

"Leon baby—if you don't stop hollering you'll make yourself sick. Abrahm, I never saw him like this—he's green——"

"I'll green him. Where is that old feedle from Isadore—that seventy-five cents one?"

"I never thought of that! You broke it that time you got mad at Isadore's lessons. I'll run down. Maybe it's with the junk behind the store. I never thought of that fiddle. Leon

darlink—wait! Mamma 'll run down and look. Wait, Leon, till mamma finds you a fiddle."

The raucous screams stopped then, suddenly, and on their very lustiest crest, leaving an echoing gash across silence. On willing feet of haste Mrs. Kantor wound down backward the high, ladder-like staircase that led to the brass-shop.

Meanwhile to a gnawing consciousness of dinner-hour had assembled the house of Kantor. Attuned to the intimate atmosphere of the tenement which is so constantly rent with cry of child, child-bearing, delirium, delirium tremens, Leon Kantor had howled no impression into the motley din of things. There was Isadore, already astride his chair, leaning well into center table, for first vociferous tear at the four-pound loaf; Esther, old at chores, settling an infant into the high chair, careful of tiny fingers in lowering the wooden bib.

"Papa, Izzie's eating first again."

"Put down that loaf and wait until your mother dishes up, or you'll get a potch you won't soon forget."

"Say, pop——"

"Don't 'say pop' me! I don't want no street-bum freshness from you!"

"I mean, papa, there was an up-town swell in, and she bought one of them seventy-five-cent candlesticks for the first price."

"Schlemmil! Chammer!" said Mr. Kantor,

rinsing his hands at the sink. "Didn't I always tell you it's the first price, times two, when you see up-town business come in? Haven't I learned it to you often enough a slummer must pay for her nosiness?"

There entered then, on poor, shuffling feet, Mannie Kantor, so marred in the mysterious and ceramic process of life that the brain and the soul had stayed back sooner than inhabit him. Seventeen in years, in the down upon his face and in growth unretarded by any great nervosity of system, his vacuity of face was not that of childhood, but rather as if his light eyes were peering out from some hinterland and wanting so terribly and so dumbly to communicate what they beheld to brain-cells closed against himself.

At sight of Mannie, Leon Kantor, the tears still wetly and dirtily down his cheeks, left off his black, fierce-eyed stare of waiting long enough to smile, darkly, it is true, but sweetly.

"Giddy-app!" he cried. "Giddy-app!"

And then Mannie, true to habit, would scamper and scamper.

Up out of the traplike stair-opening came the head of Mrs. Kantor, disheveled and a smudge of soot across her face, but beneath her arm, triumphant, a violin of one string and a broken back.

"See, Leon—what mamma got! A violin!

A fiddle! Look! The bow, too, I found. It ain't much, baby, but it's a fiddle."

"Aw, ma—that's my old violin. Gimme. I want it. Where'd you find——"

"Hush up, Izzie! This ain't yours no more. See, Leon, what mamma brought you. A violin!"

"Now, you little *chammer,* you got a feedle, and if you ever let me hear you holler again for a feedle, by golly! if I don't——"

From his corner, Leon Kantor reached out, taking the instrument and fitting it beneath his chin, the bow immediately feeling, surely and lightly, for string.

"Look, Abrahm, he knows how to hold it! What did I tell you? A child that never in his life seen a fiddle, except a beggar's on the street!"

Little Esther suddenly cantered down-floor, clapping her chubby hands.

"Lookie—lookie—Leon!"

The baby ceased clattering his spoon against the wooden bib. A silence seemed to shape itself.

So black and so bristly of head, his little clawlike hands hovering over the bow, Leon Kantor withdrew a note, strangely round and given up almost sobbingly from the single string. A note of warm twining quality, like a baby's finger.

"Leon—darlink!"

Fumbling for string and for notes the instrument could not yield up to him, the birdlike mouth began once more to open widely and terribly into the orificial O.

It was then Abrahm Kantor came down with a large hollow resonance of palm against that aperture, lifting his small son and depositing him plop upon the family album.

"Take that! By golly! one more whimper out of you and if I don't make you black-and-blue, birthday or no birthday! Dish up, Sarah, quick, or I'll give him something to cry about."

The five pink candles had been lighted, burning pointedly and with slender little smoke wisps. Regarding them owlishly, the tears dried on Leon's face, his little tongue licking up at them.

"Look how solemn he is, like he was thinking of something a million miles away except how lucky he is he should have a pink birthday-cake. Uh—uh—uh! Don't you begin to holler again. Here, I'm putting the feedle next to you. Uh—uh—uh!"

To a meal plentifully ladled out directly from stove to table, the Kantor family drew up, dipping first into the rich black soup of the occasion. All except Mrs. Kantor.

"Esther, you dish up. I'm going somewhere. I'll be back in a minute."

"Where you going, Sarah? Won't it keep until——"

But even in the face of query, Sarah Kantor was two flights down and well through the lambent aisles of the copper-shop. Outside, she broke into run, along two blocks of the indescribable bazaar atmosphere of Grand Street, then one block to the right.

Before Naftel's show-window, a jet of bright gas burned into a Jabberwock land of toys. There was that in Sarah Kantor's face that was actually lyrical as, fumbling at the bosom of her dress, she entered.

To Leon Kantor, by who knows what symphonic scheme of things, life was a chromatic scale, yielding up to him, through throbbing, living nerves of sheep-gut, the sheerest semitones of man's emotions.

When he tucked his Stradivarius beneath his chin the book of life seemed suddenly translated to him in melody. Even Sarah Kantor, who still brewed for him, on a small portable stove carried from city to city and surreptitiously unpacked in hotel suites, the blackest of soups, and, despite his protestation, would incase his ears of nights in an old home-made device against their flightiness, would oftentimes bleed inwardly at this sense of his isolation.

There was a realm into which he went alone, leaving her as detached as the merest ticket purchaser at the box-office.

At seventeen Leon Kantor had played before the crowned heads of Europe, the aching heads of American capital, and even the shaved head of a South Sea prince. There was a layout of anecdotal gifts, from the molar tooth of the South Sea prince set in a South Sea pearl to a blue-enameled snuff-box incrusted with the rearing-lion coat of arms of a very royal house.

At eighteen came the purchase of a king's Stradivarius for a king's ransom, and acclaimed by Sunday supplements to repose of nights in an ivory cradle.

At nineteen, under careful auspices of press-agent, the ten singing digits of the son of Abrahm Kantor were insured at ten thousand dollars the finger.

At twenty he had emerged surely and safely from the perilous quicksands which have sucked down whole Lilliputian worlds of infant prodigies.

At twenty-one, when Leon Kantor played a Sunday-night concert, there was a human queue curling entirely around the square block of the opera-house, waiting its one, two, even three and four hours for the privilege of standing room only.

Usually these were Leon Kantor's own peo-

ple pouring up from the lowly lands of the East Side to the white lands of Broadway, parched for music, these burning brethren of his—old men in that line, frequently carrying their own little folding camp-chairs, not against weariness of the spirit, but of the flesh; youth with Slavic eyes and cheek-bones. These were the six-deep human phalanx which would presently slant down at him from the tiers of steepest balconies and stand frankly emotional and jammed in the unreserved space behind the railing which shut them off from the three-dollar seats of the reserved.

At a very special one of these concerts, dedicated to the meager purses of just these, and held in New York's super opera-house, the Amphitheater, a great bowl of humanity, the metaphor made perfect by tiers of seats placed upon the stage, rose from orchestra to dome. A gigantic cup of a Colosseum lined in stacks and stacks of faces. From the door of his dressing-room, leaning out, Leon Kantor could see a great segment of it, buzzing down into adjustment, orchestra twitting and tuning into it.

In the bare little room, illuminated by a sheaf of roses, just arrived, Mrs. Kantor drew him back by the elbow.

"Leon, you're in a draught."

The amazing years had dealt kindly with

Mrs. Kantor. Stouter, softer, apparently even taller, she was full of small new authorities that could shut out cranks, newspaper reporters, and autograph fiends. A fitted-over-corsets black taffeta and a high comb in the graying hair had done their best with her. Pride, too, had left its flush upon her cheeks, like two round spots of fever.

"Leon, it's thirty minutes till your first number. Close that door. Do you want to let your papa and his excitement in on you?"

The son of Sarah Kantor obeyed, leaning his short, rather narrow form in silhouette against the closed door. In spite of slimly dark evening clothes worked out by an astute manager to the last detail in boyish effects, there was that about him which defied long-haired precedent. Slimly and straightly he had shot up into an unmannered, a short, even a bristly-haired young manhood, disqualifying by a close shave for the older school of hirsute virtuosity.

But his nerves did not spare him. On concert nights they seemed to emerge almost to the surface of him and shriek their exposure.

"Just feel my hands, ma. Like ice."

She dived down into her large silk what-not of a reticule.

"I've got your fleece-lined gloves here, son."

"No—no! For God's sake—not those things! No!"

He was back at the door again, opening it to a slit, peering through.

"They're bringing more seats on the stage. If they crowd me I won't go on. I can't play if I hear them breathe. Hi—out there—no more chairs! Pa! Hancock——"

"Leon, Leon, ain't you ashamed to get so worked up? Close that door. Have you got a manager who is paid just to see to your comfort? When papa comes, I'll have him go out and tell Hancock you don't want chairs so close to you. Leon, will you mind mamma and sit down?"

"It's a bigger house than the royal concert in Madrid, ma. Why, I never saw anything like it! It's a stampede. God! this is real—this is what gets me, playing for my own! I should have given a concert like this three years ago. I'll do it every year now. I'd rather play before them than all the crowned heads on earth. It's the biggest night of my life. They're rioting out there, ma—rioting to get in."

"Leon, Leon, won't you sit down, if mamma begs you to?"

He sat down, strumming with all ten fingers upon his knees.

"Try to get quiet, son. Count—like you always do. One—two—three——"

"Please, ma — for God's sake — please— please!"

"Look—such beautiful roses! From Sol Ginsberg, an old friend of papa's he used to buy brasses from eighteen years ago. Six years he's been away with his daughter in Munich. Such a beautiful mezzo they say, engaged already for Metropolitan next season."

"I hate it, ma, if they breathe on my neck."

"Leon darlink, did mamma promise to fix it? Have I ever let you play a concert when you wouldn't be comfortable?"

His long, slim hands suddenly prehensile and cutting a streak of upward gesture, Leon Kantor rose to his feet, face whitening.

"Do it now! Now, I tell you. I won't have them breathe on me. Do you hear me? Now! Now! Now!"

Risen also, her face soft and tremulous for him, Mrs. Kantor put out a gentle, a sedative hand upon his sleeve.

"Son," she said, with an edge of authority even behind her smile, "don't holler at me!"

He grasped her hand with his two and, immediately quiet, laid a close string of kisses along it.

"Mamma," he said, kissing again and again into the palm, "mamma—mamma."

"I know, son; it's nerves!"

"They eat me, ma. Feel—I'm like ice! I didn't mean it; you know I didn't mean it!"

"My baby," she said, "my wonderful boy, it's like I can never get used to the wonder of having you. The greatest one of them all should be mine—a plain woman's like mine!"

He teased her, eager to conciliate and to ride down his own state of quivering.

"Now, ma—now—now—don't forget Rimsky!"

"Rimsky! A man three times your age who was playing concerts before you was born! Is that a comparison? From your clippings-books I can show Rimsky who the world considers the greatest violinist. Rimsky he rubs into me!"

"All right, then, the press-clippings, but did Elsass, the greatest manager of them all, bring me a contract for thirty concerts at two thousand a concert? Now I've got you! Now!"

She would not meet his laughter. "Elsass! Believe me, he'll come to you yet! My boy should worry if he makes fifty thousand a year more or less. Rimsky should have that honor—for so long as he can hold it. But he won't hold it long. Believe me, I don't rest easy in my bed till Elsass comes after you. Not for so big a contract like Rimsky's, but bigger—not for thirty concerts, but for fifty!"

"Brava! Brava! There's a woman for you.

More money than she knows what to do with, and then not satisfied!"

She was still too tremulous for banter. "'Not satisfied'? Why, Leon, I never stop praying my thanks for you!"

"All right, then," he cried, laying his icy fingers on her cheek; "tomorrow we'll call a *mignon*—a regular old-fashioned Allen Street prayer-party."

"Leon, you mustn't make fun."

"Make fun of the sweetest girl in this room!"

"'Girl'! Ah, if I could only hold you by me this way, Leon. Always a boy—with me—your poor old mother—your only girl. That's a fear I suffer with, Leon—to lose you to a—girl. That's how selfish the mother of such a wonder-child like mine can get to be."

"All right! Trying to get me married off again. Nice! Fine!"

"Is it any wonder I suffer, son? Twenty-one years to have kept you by me a child. A boy that never in his life was out after midnight except to catch trains. A boy that never has so much as looked at a girl and could have looked at princesses. To have kept you all these years—mine—is it any wonder, son, I never stop praying my thanks for you? You don't believe Hancock, son, the way he keeps always teasing you that you should have a—

what he calls—affair—a love-affair? Such talk is not nice, Leon—an affair!"

"Love-affair poppycock!" said Leon Kantor, lifting his mother's face and kissing her on eyes about ready to tear. "Why, I've got something, ma, right here in my heart for you that——"

"Leon, be careful your shirt-front!"

"That's so—so what you call 'tender,' for my best sweetheart that I— Oh, love-affair—poppycock!"

She would not let her tears come.

"My boy—my wonder-boy!"

"There goes the overture, ma."

"Here, darlink—your glass of water."

"I can't stand it in here; I'm suffocating!"

"Got your mute in your pocket, son?"

"Yes, ma; for God's sake, yes! Yes! Don't keep asking things!"

"Ain't you ashamed, Leon, to be in such an excitement! For every concert you get worse."

"The chairs—they'll breathe on my neck."

"Leon, did mamma promise you those chairs would be moved?"

"Where's Hancock?"

"Say—I'm grateful if he stays out. It took me enough work to get this room cleared. You know your papa how he likes to drag in the whole world to show you off—always just be-

fore you play. The minute he walks in the room right away he gets everybody to trembling just from his own excitements. I dare him this time he should bring people. No dignity has that man got, the way he brings every one."

Even upon her words came a rattling of door, of door-knob, and a voice through the clamor.

"Open—quick—Sarah! Leon!"

A stiffening raced over Mrs. Kantor, so that she sat rigid on her chair-edge, lips compressed, eye darkly upon the shivering door.

"Open—Sarah!"

With a narrowing glance, Mrs. Kantor laid to her lips a forefinger of silence.

"Sarah, it's me! Quick, I say!"

Then Leon Kantor sprang up, the old prehensile gesture of curving fingers shooting up.

"For God's sake, ma, let him in! I can't stand that infernal battering."

"Abrahm, go away! Leon's got to have quiet before his concert."

"Just a minute, Sarah. Open quick!"

With a spring his son was at the door, unlocking and flinging it back.

"Come in, pa."

The years had weighed heavily upon Abrahm Kantor in avoirdupois only. He was himself plus eighteen years, fifty pounds, and a new sleek pomposity that was absolutely oleaginous.

It shone roundly in his face, doubling of chin, in the bulge of waistcoat, heavily gold-chained, and in eyes that behind the gold-rimmed glasses gave sparklingly forth his estate of well-being.

"Abrahm, didn't I tell you not to dare to—"

On excited balls of feet that fairly bounced him, Abrahm Kantor burst in.

"Leon—mamma—I got out here an old friend—Sol Ginsberg. You remember, mamma, from brasses——"

"Abrahm—not now——"

"Go 'way with your 'not now'! I want Leon should meet him. Sol, this is him—a little grown up from such a *nebich* like you remember him—*nu?* Sarah, you remember Sol Ginsberg? Say—I should ask you if you remember your right hand! Ginsberg & Esel, the firm. This is his girl, a five years' contract signed yesterday—five hundred dollars an opera for a beginner—six rôles—not bad—*nu?*"

"Abrahm, you must ask Mr. Ginsberg please to excuse Leon until after his concert——"

"Shake hands with him, Ginsberg. He's had his hands shook enough in his life, and by kings, to shake it once more with an old bouncer like you!"

Mr. Ginsberg, not unlike his colleague in rotundities, held out a short, a dimpled hand.

"It's a proud day," he said, "for me to shake

the hands from mine old friend's son and the finest violinist living today. My little daughter——"

"Yes, yes, Gina. Here, shake hands with him. Leon, they say a voice like a fountain. Gina Berg—eh, Ginsberg—is how you stage-named her? You hear, mamma, how fancy—Gina Berg? We go hear her, eh?"

There was about Miss Gina Berg, whose voice could soar to the tirra-lirra of a lark and then deepen to mezzo, something of the actual slimness of the poor, maligned Elsa so long buried beneath the buxomness of divas. She was like a little flower that in its crannied nook keeps dewy longest.

"How do you do, Leon Kantor?"

There was a whir through her English of three acquired languages.

"How do *you* do?"

"We—father and I—traveled once all the way from Brussels to Dresden to hear you. It was worth it. I shall never forget how you played the 'Humoresque.' It made me laugh and cry."

"You like Brussels?"

She laid her little hand to her heart, half closing her eyes.

"I will never be so happy again as with the sweet little people of Brussels."

"I, too, love Brussels. I studied there four years with Ahrenfest."

"I know you did. My teacher, Lyndahl, in Berlin, was his brother-in-law."

"You have studied with Lyndahl?"

"He is my master."

"I— Will I some time hear you sing?"

"I am not yet great. When I am foremost like you, yes."

"Gina—Gina Berg; that is a beautiful name to make famous."

"You see how it is done? Gins—berg. Gina Berg."

"Clev-er!"

They stood then smiling across a chasm of the diffidence of youth, she fumbling at the great fur pelt out of which her face flowered so dewily.

"I— Well—we—we—we are in the fourth box— I guess we had better be going— Fourth box, left."

He wanted to find words, but for consciousness of self, could not.

"It's a wonderful house out there waiting for you, Leon Kantor, and you—you're wonderful, too!"

"The—flowers—thanks!"

"My father, he sent them. Come, father—quick!"

Suddenly there was a tight tensity seemed to crowd up the little room.

"Abrahm—quick—get Hancock. That first row of chairs—has got to be moved. There he is, in the wings. See that the piano ain't dragged down too far! Leon, got your mute in your pocket? Please, Mr. Ginsberg—you must excuse— Here, Leon, is your glass of water; drink it, I say. Shut that door out there, boy, so there ain't a draught in the wings. Here, Leon, your violin. Got your neckerchief? Listen how they're shouting! It's for you—Leon—darlink— Go!"

The center of that vast human bowl which had shouted itself out, slim, boylike, and in his supreme isolation, Leon Kantor drew bow and a first thin, pellucid, and perfect note into a silence breathless to receive it.

Throughout the arduous flexuosities of the Mendelssohn E minor concerto, singing, winding from tonal to tonal climax, and out of the slow movement which is like a tourniquet twisting the heart into the spirited *allegro molto vivace,* it was as if beneath Leon Kantor's fingers the strings were living vein-cords, youth, vitality, and the very form of exuberance racing through them.

That was the power of him. The vichy and the sparkle of youth, so that, playing, the melody poured round him like wine and went down

seething and singing into the hearts of his hearers.

Later, and because these were his people and because they were dark and Slavic with his Slavic darkness, he played, as if his very blood were weeping, the "Kol Nidre," which is the prayer of his race for atonement.

And then the super-amphitheater, filled with those whose emotions lie next to the surface and whose pores have not been closed over with a water-tight veneer, burst into its cheers and its tears.

There were fifteen recalls from the wings, Abrahm Kantor standing counting them off on his fingers and trembling to receive the Stradivarius. Then, finally, and against the frantic negative pantomime of his manager, a scherzo, played so lacily that it swept the house in lightest laughter.

When Leon Kantor finally completed his program they were loath to let him go, crowding down the aisles upon him, applauding up, down, around him until the great disheveled house was like the roaring of a sea, and he would laugh and throw out his arm in widespread helplessness, and always his manager in the background gesticulating against too much of his precious product for the money, ushers already slamming up chairs, his father's arms out for the Stradivarius, and, deepest in the gloom of the

wings, Sarah Kantor, in a rocker especially dragged out for her, and from the depths of the black-silk reticule, darning his socks.

"Bravo—bravo! Give us the 'Humoresque' — Chopin Nocturne — Polonaise — 'Humoresque.' Bravo—bravo!"

And even as they stood, hatted and coated, importuning and pressing in upon him, and with a wisp of a smile to the fourth left box, Leon Kantor played them the "Humoresque" of Dvorák, skedaddling, plucking, quirking—that laugh on life with a tear behind it. Then suddenly, because he could escape no other way, rushed straight back for his dressing-room, bursting in upon a flood of family already there: Isadore Kantor, blue-shaved, aquiline, and already graying at the temples; his five-year-old son, Leon; a soft little pouter-pigeon of a wife, too, enormous of bust, in glittering ear-drops and a wrist watch of diamonds half buried in chubby wrist; Miss Esther Kantor, pink and pretty; Rudolph; Boris, not yet done with growing-pains.

At the door Miss Kantor met her brother, her eyes as sweetly moist as her kiss.

"Leon, darling, you surpassed even yourself!"

"Quit crowding, children. Let him sit down. Here, Leon, let mamma give you a fresh collar. Look how the child's perspired. Pull

down that window, Boris. Rudolph, don't let no one in. I give you my word if tonight wasn't as near as I ever came to seeing a house go crazy. Not even that time in Milan, darlink, when they broke down the doors, was it like tonight——"

"Ought to seen, ma, the row of police outside——"

"Hush up, Roody! Don't you see your brother is trying to get his breath?"

From Mrs. Isadore Kantor: "You should have seen the balconies, mother. Isadore and I went up just to see the jam."

"Six thousand dollars in the house tonight, if there was a cent," said Isadore Kantor.

"Hand me my violin, please, Esther. I must have scratched it, the way they pushed."

"No, son, you didn't. I've already rubbed it up. Sit quiet, darlink!"

He was limply white, as if the vitality had flowed out of him.

"God! wasn't it—tremendous?"

"Six thousand, if there was a cent," repeated Isadore Kantor. "More than Rimsky ever played to in his life!"

"Oh, Izzie, you make me sick, always counting—counting!"

"Your sister's right, Isadore. You got nothing to complain of if there was only six hundred in the house. A boy whose fiddle has

made already enough to set you up in such a fine business, his brother Boris in such a fine college, automobiles—style—and now because Vladimir Rimsky, three times his age, gets signed up with Elsass for a few thousand more a year, right away the family gets a long face——"

"Ma, please! Isadore didn't mean it that way!"

"Pa's knocking, ma! Shall I let him in?"

"Let him in, Roody. I'd like to know what good it will do to try to keep him out."

In an actual rain of perspiration, his tie slid well under one ear, Abrahm Kantor burst in, mouthing the words before his acute state of strangulation would let them out.

"Elsass—it's Elsass outside! He—wants—to sign—Leon—fifty concerts — coast to coast—two thousand—next season! He's got the papers—already drawn up—the pen outside waiting——"

"Abrahm!"

"Pa!"

In the silence that followed, Isadore Kantor, a poppiness of stare and a violent redness set in, suddenly turned to his five-year-old son, sticky with lollipop, and came down soundly and with smack against the infantile, the slightly outstanding and unsuspecting ear.

"Momser!" he cried. *"Chammer! Lump!*

Ganef. You hear that? Two thousand! Two thousand! Didn't I tell you—didn't I tell you to practise?"

Even as Leon Kantor put pen to this princely document, Franz Ferdinand of Serbia, the assassin's bullet cold, lay dead in state, and let slip were the dogs of war.

In the next years, men, forty deep, were to die in piles; hay-ricks of fields to become human hay-ricks of battle-fields; Belgium disemboweled, her very entrails dragging, to find all the civilized world her champion, and between the poppies of Flanders, crosses, thousand upon thousand of them, to mark the place where the youth of her allies fell, avenging outrage. Seas, even when calmest, were to become terrible, and men's heart-beats, a bit sluggish with the fatty degeneration of a sluggard peace, to quicken and then to throb with the rat-a-tat-tat, the rat-a-tat-tat of the most peremptory, the most reverberating call to arms in the history of the world.

In June, 1917, Leon Kantor, answering that rat-a-tat-tat, enlisted.

In November, honed by the interim of training to even a new leanness, and sailing-orders heavy and light in his heart, Lieutenant Kantor, on two days' home-leave, took leave of home, which can be cruelest when it is tenderest.

Standing there in the expensive, the formal, the enormous French parlor of his up-town apartment de luxe, from not one of whose chairs would his mother's feet touch floor, a wall of living flesh, mortared in blood, was throbbing and hedging him in.

He would pace up and down the long room, heavy with the faces of those who mourn, with a laugh too ready, too facetious, in his fear for them.

"Well, well, what is this, anyway, a wake? Where's the coffin? Who's dead?"

His sister-in-law shot out her plump, watch-encrusted wrist. "Don't, Leon!" she cried. "Such talk is a sin! It might come true."

"Rosie-posy-butter-ball," he said, pausing beside her chair to pinch her deeply soft cheek. "Cry-baby-roly-poly, you can't shove me off in a wooden kimono that way."

From his place before the white-and-gold mantel, staring steadfastly at the floor tiling, Isador Kantor turned suddenly, a bit whiter and older at the temples.

"I don't get your comedy, Leon."

"'Wooden kimono'—Leon?"

"That's the way the fellows at camp joke about coffins, ma. I didn't mean anything but fun! Great Scott! Can't any one take a joke!"

"O God! O God!" His mother fell to

swaying softly, hugging herself against shivering.

"Did you sign over power of attorney to pa, Leon?"

"All fixed, Izzie."

"I'm so afraid, son, you don't take with you enough money in your pockets. You know how you lose it. If only you would let mamma sew that little bag inside your uniform with a little place for bills and a little place for the asafœtida!"

"Now, please, ma—please! If I needed more, wouldn't I take it? Wouldn't I be a pretty joke among the fellows, tied up in that smelling stuff! Orders are orders, ma. I know what to take and what not to take."

"Please, Leon, don't get mad at me, but if you will let me put in your suit-case just one little box of that salve, for your finger-tips, so they don't crack——"

Pausing as he paced to lay cheek to her hair, he patted her. "Three boxes, if you want. Now, how's that?"

"And you won't take it out so soon as my back is turned?"

"Cross my heart."

His touch seemed to set her trembling again, all her illy concealed emotions rushing up. "I can't stand it! Can't! Can't! Take my life

—take my blood, but don't take my boy—don't take my boy——"

"Mamma, mamma, is that the way you're going to begin all over again, after your promise?"

She clung to him, heaving against the rising storm of sobs. "I can't help it—can't! Cut out my heart from me, but let me keep my boy —my wonder-boy——"

"Oughtn't she be ashamed of herself? Just listen to her, Esther! What will we do with her? Talks like she had a guarantee I wasn't coming back. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if by spring I wasn't turning up again for a coast-to-coast tour——"

"Spring! That talk don't fool me. Without my boy, the springs in my life are over——"

"Why, ma, you talk like every soldier who goes to war was killed! There's only the smallest percentage of them die in battle——"

" 'Spring,' he says; 'spring'! Crossing the seas from me! To live through months with that sea between us—my boy maybe shot—my——"

"Mamma, please!"

"I can't help it, Leon; I'm not one of those fine mothers that can be so brave. Cut out my heart, but leave my boy. My wonder-boy —my child I prayed for!"

"There's other mothers, ma, with sons!"

"Yes, but not wonder-sons! A genius like you could so easy get excused, Leon. Give it up. Genius it should be the last to be sent to—the slaughter-pen. Leon darlink—don't go!"

"Ma, ma—you don't mean what you're saying. You wouldn't want me to reason that way! You wouldn't want me to hide behind my—violin."

"I would! Would! You should wait for the draft. With my Roody and even my baby Boris enlisted, ain't it enough for one mother? Since they got to be in camp, all right, I say, let them be there, if my heart breaks for it, but not my wonder-child! You can get exemption, Leon, right away for the asking. Stay with me, Leon! Don't go away! The people at home got to be kept happy with music. That's being a soldier, too, playing their troubles away. Stay with me, Leon! Don't go leave me—don't—don't——"

He suffered her to lie, tear-drenched, back into his arms, holding her close in his compassion for her, his own face twisting.

"God! ma, this—this is awful! Please—you make us ashamed—all of us! I don't know what to say. Esther, come quiet her—for God's sake, quiet her!"

From her place in that sobbing circle Esther Kantor crossed to kneel beside her mother.

"Mamma darling, you're killing yourself.

What if every family went on this way? You want papa to come in and find us all crying? Is this the way you want Leon to spend his last hour with us——"

"Oh, God—God!"

"I mean his last hour until he comes back, darling. Didn't you just hear him say, darling, it may be by spring?"

" 'Spring'—'spring'—never no more springs for me——"

"Just think, darling, how proud we should be! Our Leon, who could so easily have been excused, not even to wait for the draft."

"It's not too late yet—please—Leon——"

"Our Roody and Boris both in camp, too, training to serve their country. Why, mamma, we ought to be crying for happiness. As Leon says, surely the Kantor family, who fled out of Russia to escape massacre, should know how terrible slavery can be. That's why we must help our boys, mamma, in their fight to make the world free! Right, Leon?" trying to smile with her red-rimmed eyes.

"We've got no fight with no one! Not a child of mine was ever raised to so much as lift a finger against no one. We've got no fight with no one!"

"We have got a fight with some one! With autocracy! Only this time it happens to be Hunnish autocracy. You should know it,

mamma—oh, you should know it deeper down in you than any of us, the fight our family right here has got with autocracy! We should be the first to want to avenge Belgium!"

"Leon's right, mamma darling, the way you and papa were beaten out of your country—"

"There's not a day in your life you don't curse it without knowing it! Every time we three boys look at your son and our brother Mannie, born an—an imbecile—because of autocracy, we know what we're fighting for. We know. You know, too. Look at him over there, even before he was born, ruined by autocracy! Know what I'm fighting for? Why, this whole family knows. What's music, what's art, what's life itself in a world without freedom? Every time, ma, you get to thinking we've got a fight with no one, all you have to do is look at our poor Mannie. He's the answer. He's the answer."

In a foaming sort of silence, Mannie Kantor smiled softly from his chair beneath the pink-and-gold shade of the piano-lamp. The heterogeneous sounds of women weeping had ceased. Straight in her chair, her great shelf of bust heaving, sat Rosa Kantor, suddenly dry of eye; Isadore Kantor head up. Erect now, and out from the embrace of her daughter, Sarah looked up at her son.

"What time do you leave, Leon?" she asked, actually firm of lip.

"Any minute, ma. Getting late."

This time she pulled her lips to a smile, wagging her forefinger.

"Don't let them little devils of French girls fall in love with my dude in his uniform."

Her pretense at pleasantry was almost more than he could bear.

"Hear! Hear! Our mother thinks I'm a regular lady-killer! Hear that, Esther?" pinching her cheek.

"You are, Leon—only—only, you don't know it!"

"Don't you bring down too many beaux while I am gone, either, Miss Kantor!"

"I—won't, Leon."

Sotto voce to her: "Remember, Esther, while I'm gone, the royalties from the discaphone records are yours. I want you to have them for pin-money and—maybe a dowry?"

She turned from him. "Don't, Leon—don't——"

"I like him! Nice fellow, but too slow! Why, if I were in his shoes I'd have popped long ago."

She smiled with her lashes dewy.

There entered then, in a violet-scented little whirl, Miss Gina Berg, rosy with the sting of

a winter's night, and, as usual, swathed in the high-napped furs.

"Gina!"

She was for greeting every one, a wafted kiss to Mrs. Kantor, and then, arms wide, a great bunch of violets in one outstretched hand, her glance straight, sure, and sparkling for Leon Kantor.

"Surprise—everybody—surprise!"

"Why, Gina—we read—we thought you were singing in Philadelphia, tonight!"

"So did I, Esther darling, until a little bird whispered to me that Lieutenant Kantor was home on farewell leave."

He advanced to her down the great length of room, lowering his head over her hand, his puttee-clad legs clicking together. "You mean, Miss Gina—Gina—you didn't sing?"

"Of course I didn't! Hasn't every prima donna a larynx to hide behind?" She lifted off her fur cap, spilling curls.

"Well, I—I'll be hanged!" said Lieutenant Kantor, his eyes lakes of her reflected loveliness.

She let her hand linger in his. "Leon—you —really going? How—terrible! How—how —wonderful!"

"How wonderful—your coming!"

"I— You think it was not nice of me—to come?"

"I think it was the nicest thing that ever happened in the world."

"All the way here in the train I kept saying, 'Crazy—crazy—running to tell Leon—Lieutenant—Kantor good-by—when you haven't even seen him three times in three years——' "

"But each—each of those three times we—we've remembered, Gina."

"But that's how I feel toward all the boys, Leon—our fighting boys—just like flying to them to kiss them each one good-by."

"Come over, Gina. You'll be a treat to our mother. I— Well, I'm hanged! All the way from Philadelphia!"

There was even a sparkle to talk, then, and a let-up of pressure. After a while Sarah Kantor looked up at her son, tremulous, but smiling.

"Well, son, you going to play—for your old mother before—you go? It'll be many a month—spring—maybe longer, before I hear my boy again except on the discaphone."

He shot a quick glance to his sister. "Why, I—I don't know. I—I'd love it, ma, if—if you think, Esther, I'd better."

"You don't need to be afraid of me, darlink. There's nothing can give me the strength to bear—what's before me like—like my boy's music. That's my life, his music."

"Why, yes; if mamma is sure she feels that way, play for us, Leon."

He was already at the instrument, where it lay, swathed, atop the grand piano. "What 'll it be, folks?"

"Something to make me laugh, Leon—something light, something funny."

" 'Humoresque,' " he said, with a quick glance for Miss Berg.

" 'Humoresque,' " she said, smiling back at him.

He capered through, cutting and playful of bow, the melody of Dvorák's, which is as ironic as a grinning mask.

Finished, he smiled at his parent, her face still untearful.

"How's that?"

She nodded. "It's like life, son, that piece. Crying to hide its laughing and laughing to hide its crying."

"Play that new piece, Leon—the one you set to music. You know. The words by that young boy in the war who wrote such grand poetry before he was killed. The one that always makes poor Mannie laugh. Play it for him, Leon."

Her plump little unlined face innocent of fault, Mrs. Isadore Kantor ventured her request, her smile tired with tears.

"No, no—Rosa, not now! Ma wouldn't want that!"

"I do, son; I do! Even Mannie should have his share of good-by."

To Gina Berg: "They want me to play that little arrangement of mine from Allan Seeger's poem. 'I Have a Rendezvous . . .'"

"It—it's beautiful, Leon. I was to have sung it on my program tonight—only, I'm afraid you had better not—here—now——"

"Please, Leon! Nothing you play can ever make me as sad as it makes me glad. Mannie should have, too, his good-by."

"All right, then, ma, if—if you're sure you want it. Will you sing it, Gina?"

She had risen. "Why, yes, Leon."

She sang it then, quite purely, her hands clasped simply together and her glance mistily off, the beautiful, the heroic, the lyrical prophecy of a soldier-poet and a poet-soldier:

> "But I've a rendezvous with Death
> On some scarred slope of battered hill,
> When spring comes round again this year
> And the first meadow-flowers appear."

In the silence that followed, a sob burst out, stifled, from Esther Kantor, this time her mother holding her in arms that were strong.

"That, Leon, is the most beautiful of all your compositions. What does it mean, son, that word, 'rondy-voo'?"

"Why, I—I don't exactly know. A rendez-

vous—it's a sort of meeting, an engagement, isn't it, Miss Gina? Gina? You're up on languages. As if I had an appointment to meet you some place—at the opera-house, for instance."

"That's it, Leon—an engagement."

"Have I an engagement with you, Gina?"

She let her lids droop. "Oh, how—how I hope you have, Leon."

"When?"

"In the spring?"

"That's it—in the spring."

Then they smiled, these two, who had never felt more than the merest butterfly wings of love brushing them, light as lashes. No word between them, only an unfinished sweetness, waiting to be linked up.

Suddenly there burst in Abrahm Kantor, in a carefully rehearsed gale of bluster.

"Quick, Leon! I got the car down-stairs. Just fifteen minutes to make the ferry. Quick! The sooner we get him over there the sooner we get him back! I'm right, mamma? Now, now! No waterworks! Get your brother's suit-case, Isadore. Now, now! No nonsense! Quick—quick——"

With a deftly manœuvered round of good-bys, a grip-laden dash for the door, a throbbing moment of turning back when it seemed as though Sarah Kantor's arms could not unlock

their deadlock of him, Leon Kantor was out and gone, the group of faces point-etched into the silence behind him.

The poor, mute face of Mannie, laughing softly. Rosa Kantor crying into her hands. Esther, grief-crumpled, but rich in the enormous hope of youth. The sweet Gina, to whom the waiting months had already begun their reality.

Not so Sarah Kantor. In a bedroom adjoining, its high-ceilinged vastness as cold as a cathedral to her lowness of stature, sobs dry and terrible were rumbling up from her, only to dash against lips tightly restraining them.

On her knees beside a chest of drawers, and unwrapping it from swaddling-clothes, she withdrew what at best had been a sorry sort of fiddle.

Cracked of back and solitary of string, it was as if her trembling arms, raising it above her head, would make of themselves and her swaying body the tripod of an altar.

The old twisting and prophetic pain was behind her heart. Like the painted billows of music that the old Italian masters loved to do, there wound and wreathed about her clouds of song:

> "But I've a rendezvous with Death
> On some scarred slope of battered hill,
> When spring comes round again this year
> And the first meadow-flowers appear."

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SIR PHILIP GIBBS

FOREWORD

I LIKE this story of mine because there is no touch of falsity in it, and it gets close to the tragedy of war between civilised nations and the souls of men and women. The episode of the fight with the marble Venus is historical. It happened as I have told it, with the same ferocity. I went into the ruins of that château of Vermelles not long after its capture and when it was a sinister place very close to the German lines from which one was glad—and lucky—to get out alive. The characters I have taken for this story are imaginary, but there were women in Paris who suffered in their hearts that frightful conflict between love and patriotism. I knew one of them but her story was not the same as I have written. Perhaps only in France could there be such a woman, and one has to have known France in those days to understand the flame of hatred for the enemy which possessed the women even more than the men. But this story is not a study in hatred. It is rather a drama which shows how the passion of war IS a trap in which often the human heart is caught and tortured. Anyhow it is true to the things I saw in wartime and when peace came with its first delirium of joy to all but those who remembered too much.

The LIEUTENANT *of the* MARBLE VENUS

By Sir Philip Gibbs

During the Peace Conference in Paris it was possible to stay in a good hotel, without financial ruin, only if one happened to be a diplomat, the private secretary of a diplomat, the typist of the private secretary of a diplomat, a newspaper correspondent with unlimited expenses, or a millionaire. Being at the moment none of those things, but only an unattached onlooker of the greatest drama in the world, I took a bed-sitting-room in the Rue de la Pompe at Passy, and was lucky as well as comfortable. It was cheap and quiet, at a time when Paris was expensive to fantastic heights and noisy with the feverish excitement of a people who, after years of frightful sacrifice, went a little mad with the joy of victory and believed—before the time of disillusionment—that from the peace table at Versailles would come compensation for their ruin.

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"Germany will be made to pay!" was the confession of faith in Paris, and that false belief in Germany's capacity to pay the entire costs of war—apart from the raising of the innumerable dead—was bolstered up by the government and the press. So Paris gave itself up to dancing and singing in the streets; to a pagan riot of love and ecstasy, except where in quiet rooms women wept a little because the end of war and great victory would not bring back their men.

In one of the rooms where I stayed there was a woman who wept a little, and I guessed it was for the same reason. She was the mother of a small boy aged seven or eight, by the look of him, with whom I had made friends as he played about on the staircase. He was a beautiful boy, rather English in colour and features to be the son of a French mother. He had a mop of flaxen hair cut straight round the neck in the bobbed style of grown-up girls, and blue eyes. He seemed to me a lonely youngster, playing so much by himself on the staircase, with toy engines and the little lead soldiers beloved of all French children; but he was not unhappy, and answered brightly and merrily when I spoke to him.

"Fine soldiers!" I said when we first met. "Are they all Frenchmen?"

"Nearly all," he answered in quick, childish

French. "Here is Papa Joffre and Foch and Petain and Guynemer the ace. But I have some English too. Six of them. They cost six sous apiece, and I cannot buy more because my *maman* is too poor."

"How about the enemy?"

He called them *"sacrés Boches,"* and told me that they were not sold in the shops. He had to imagine them, and he killed hundreds of them every day.

"During the war *maman* always asked me how many Boches I had killed, and when I said, 'One hundred this morning,' she used to say, 'That is not enough!' So then I said, 'Two hundred,' and she said again, 'That is not enough!' Sometimes I would say, 'A thousand,' and she would smile and say, 'That is better!' She was very pleased when I said, 'A hundred thousand.' 'Soon we will win the war,' she said, 'if you go on killing them like that.'"

I believe this child was convinced in his imaginative way that he had helped to win the war by so great a slaughter of the enemy, and I could not help shivering a little at the gruesomeness of his game, which acquired a kind of reality because of his mother's greed for more dead.

Yet she was not a grim-looking woman. Indeed, I thought—and still think—that she

had a pretty and seductive face, in spite of being a little too thin and fragile. She was quite young. She could not have been more than a girl when this boy was born before the war; and that she was a lady of good birth and refinement was obvious in every gesture she made and every word she spoke. Madame de Thilloy was her name, so the *concierge* told me, and her boy was Charles.

"Her husband?" I asked, and the fat old woman who acted as *concierge* in a dirty little room on the ground floor of this house in the Rue de la Pompe mumbled something about the cruelty of war and the massacre of youth.

I was not surprised therefore when, on the day of the Peace celebrations, I noticed that Madame de Thilloy still wore her black dress and that her eyes were red with weeping at a time when the music of victory was passing down the streets and hundreds of thousands of young women were laughing and singing and throwing flowers at passing soldiers and kissing English and American officers and proclaiming to the high heaven their joy because life was good enough again after the years of death.

As I came upstairs toward the door of their apartment, which was wide open, the boy Charles was clasping his mother's dress and imploring her to go out with him.

"Maman, maman!" cried the boy. "I want to see Papa Joffre and Marshal Foch! I want to see the flags passing, and all the soldiers!"

"The crowds are too big, my son," said the young mother. "Let us stay quietly at home, and I will buy you some bonbons."

"I don't want any bonbons!" shouted the boy. "I want to see the Victory March!"

He raged at her with a sudden childish fury.

"I will go out!" he stormed in a desperate way. "You are not good if you do not take me!"

Madame de Thilloy spoke to him sharply and slapped his hands, which were clinging to her.

"Silence! You are behaving like a little Boche. I will shut you up alone if you are so ill-mannered."

It seemed to me a harsh thing to say, though the child had lost his temper in a sudden passion of rage and disappointment. But then this French girl, who was so young a mother, bent down and put her arms about the boy and kissed his flaxen hair.

"My little son," she cried in a pitiful way, "do not ask me to go out! I have not the courage! I am a little sad today!"

The boy jerked himself away from her embrace and stood breathing hard, with a mutinous look; and it was then that I passed, having

heard what had happened as I stood a moment on the landing.

"Forgive me," I said to the girl—even now she was hardly more than that; "will you let me take your boy out to see the victory procession? It's a historic day and he ought not to miss it. As a French boy he has a right to see it."

The girl looked at me in a startled way, not having seen my approach, and then, I am sure, she was going to say something which was almost on her lips before she checked the words. It was something enormously tragic, as I now know, but after that hesitation in which our eyes met she spoke ordinary words of thanks.

"You are very kind. It would be a great disappointment to my boy not to go, and I am too unwell today to take him. If it would not be asking too much——"

"I shall be delighted," I said.

That was indeed the truth, and I had a fine day with Charles de Thilloy, whose rapture and enthusiasm at the sight of the French generals and colours and troops helped me to face the ghosts of great armies of dead youth who marched beside these living men, and the thought of all the ruin that was left in Europe after a victory so hardly won.

The boy seemed to me to embody the spirit

of young France. The colour that flushed his cheeks, the light of his eyes, the shrill cheers that broke from him when the heroes passed proved the ardour of his young heart, instinctive and inherited, for the glory of France as it was seen in the war—and in God knows how many wars—by the supreme valour of her manhood. I could not deny that glory, having seen it in suffering as well as in valour; yet with this young boy by my side I hoped with a kind of prayer that the youth of his race who had been left alive, and these children of victory, would escape from such another massacre as that which had soaked their fields in blood, and would adopt some philosophy greater than the power of the sword.

I took him to a little restaurant in some side street off the Avenue Victor Hugo, and we managed in spite of the crowd to get a table for two wedged in by the window. I remember how young French officers and their womenfolk looked at the child as he sat opposite me on a chair made higher by some old bound copies of *L'Illustration,* and how they smiled at him with a kind of homage in their eyes because of his beauty of childhood. To all of them he symbolised, I think, the promise of the future, like a figure of Cupid, and to them as well as to me was young France personified. At least it was so to those who sat near enough to hear his

prattle in French, though others took him for my son, with his fair hair and blue eyes, and said, *"C'est un vrai petit Anglais"*—truly English.

He tucked in a big meal, brandishing his knife and fork like a buccaneer and taking great quaffs of lemonade and clapping his hands with delight when the waiter, at my order, brought him a *coupe Jacques*. He was old in manner for his years, and when I smoked cigarettes over coffee he sat with his hands clasped under his dimpled chin, chatting gravely and answering my questions with old-fashioned politeness.

"Do you remember what the world was like before the war?" was one thing I asked him, to keep the conversation going; and he thought hard before he answered.

"Sometimes I think I do, monsieur, and sometimes I think I don't. It's like when one wakes up surprised with a dream. One doesn't know if the dream has left off. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, I understand. But don't you remember some other kind of home?"

"My mother says I don't. She says I'm dreaming, or remembering a dream, when I tell her that I once lived in a big house with a clock in the hall as high as a man, and a winding staircase going up as high as the Eiffel Tower, and my father walking up and down a

big room as wide as the Place de la Concorde, singing songs in a voice like the organ of the Madeleine."

I laughed at the child, and noticed the smiling faces of other people who were listening.

"That sounds very much like a dream!"

"There is something else I remember," said the boy, "but *maman* says it is a dream too."

"What is that?"

"I remember the first day of war, when all the people were going away and all the women were crying. Father went away too, and Mother was crying. She came and cried by my bed before I went to sleep in the night. I stroked her hand and said, 'Little *maman,* when will my father come back?' and she cried again so that my face was wet when she touched it with her cheek, and she said, 'Your father will never come back, my little son.' And then I cried too."

He spoke these words in a matter-of-fact way, without pathos or self-pity, which is not in the nature of children, but I saw how they touched the hearts of people at the table close to us. There was a painted girl there with a young officer—not a very good girl, I should say, but her eyes filled with tears, and she spoke to the officer and said, *"C'est triste, ça!"*

"My mother is sometimes a little strange," said the boy. "She does not like me to speak

about my father, who was killed. When I ask her how many Germans he put to death before they shot him, she says, 'We will not talk about that,' and if I ask too often she gets very white and angry."

I made him talk about other things, and for a time kept him interested by blowing smoke rings and making a funny face with orange-peel. But a little later he spoke about his home life again.

"Perhaps I'll have a new father soon. My *maman* can't always say no to the Lieutenant Méricourt, do you think?"

"I don't know the Lieutenant Méricourt. Who is he?"

Young Charles de Thilloy was surprised by my ignorance.

"But he is very famous, the Lieutenant Méricourt! He has the Croix de Guerre and the Légion d'Honneur, and was three times cited before the army for valour."

"I ought to have known," I said humbly.

"That was how he lost his arm. The Croix de Guerre is generally given for an arm or a leg or an eye. That seems to me a little silly, but it is the rule, I think."

"I suppose the bravest men are most likely to lose their arms and legs," I suggested.

"Foch hasn't, and he is the bravest of them all!" said this patriotic child. Then he re-

turned to the subject of Lieutenant Méricourt, who obviously came next to Foch in his list of heroes. "He wants *maman* and me to go and live with him. He loves *maman* more than anyone in the world, and after that he loves me. And I love him, so that it would be splendid to have him for a father."

"I hope it will happen," I said.

"Madame Bertrand says the Lieutenant Méricourt will never marry my mother, and when I told her she was a lying old cow she beat me over the back with a broom."

"It was rather naughty to call her that," I remarked, for the sake of discipline and high morality. "But who is this Madame Bertrand?"

"But surely you know Madame Bertrand! She is our *concierge*. She is as fat as the full moon."

It was true. I remembered the name of the old woman who always slept too soundly to pull the cord of the outside door at night until I had rung the bell to the limit of patience.

We met her when we went home hand in hand. Madame Bertrand was with her husband, and both of them were intoxicated by this day of victory, though neither of them, I am certain, owed any of their elation to alcoholic drink. The old woman's bonnet was askew and her face was as red as the rag of

revolution, though beaming with patriotic joy. Monsieur Bertrand, a little wizened man, was holding his wife's hand as though they two were a lover and his lass. I am sure they had been dancing through the streets of Paris, like so many others we had passed. They were out of breath when they came up to the courtyard of the tall house in the Rue de la Pompe of which they were the guardians.

"A glorious procession!" I said by way of greeting.

"The day of victory, monsieur! The spirit of France triumphant!"

So said the old man, taking off his hat and wiping his forehead with a big handkerchief that he drew from the tail of his coat.

"I hope the music of our bands reached as far as Berlin," said the old woman. "Those *sacrés Boches* know they are defeated now. I wish every one of them were dead, and all their race, for what they made us suffer."

"I killed a hundred thousand of them!" said the boy whose hand I held.

Madame Bertrand cackled with laughter at this statement of imaginary slaughter, and then suddenly she drew the boy to her bosom—he was lost for a moment in her capaciousness—and spoke over his head in a solemn way:

"May the good Jesus have mercy on the

mother of this child, and all poor mothers like her!"

Old Bertrand stared at the boy in a curious, shamefaced way.

"It's a pity he was born," he growled. "I've said so a thousand times."

"Name of God, a child is a child, war or no war!" cried Madame Bertrand, releasing young Charles from her clasp and stroking his hair. She turned to me in an explanatory way and added, "We weren't blessed with a little one, monsieur."

"He'd have been killed in the shambles, like all the others," said the old man.

"Yes, but a hero of France, *mon vieux!* One of those who won the victory! Ah, what honour!"

"All the same," mumbled the old man, "I didn't want young blood to save my old hairs."

The boy was holding my hand again, and staring with pondering eyes at Madame Bertrand and the old man. Whether he understood more of their talk than I did I know not, but when he tugged at my hand and led the way up the grand *escalier*—a dark and narrow staircase—he made an impatient remark which startled me.

"Those people are like my *maman!* They're sorry I was born!"

"Hush!" I said. "Don't talk like that,

Charles! It's wicked and untrue. Your *maman* loves you with all her heart, I am certain."

"I know," he answered with his childish gravity. "She loves me, but is sorry I was born. Women are like that."

I could not help laughing at that last remark from this philosopher who knew few women but his mother and Madame Bertrand. But as I laughed I had a sense of some tragedy which had cast a shadow over this child's mind, though he knew no more than I did, perhaps, as to the spectre behind the shadow.

His girl-mother, Madame de Thilloy, answered the bell when I rang at the door of his *appartement*. She embraced her boy and then turned to me graciously.

"You are very kind, monsieur. Will you not come in and take a glass of wine? I have a friend with me who would be glad to meet you."

It was Charles who shouted the friend's name with glee.

"Le Lieutenant Méricourt!"

A faint colour crept over the pale skin of Madame de Thilloy as she answered, "Yes, it is our lieutenant."

I excused myself once or twice, but as she pressed me I yielded to an invitation which seemed sincerely given.

She led the way into her little *salon,* poorly but prettily furnished, as I saw at a glance, and with that faint scent of polished wood and black coffee which lingers always in French rooms, and seems—even in imagination, as I write these words—to bring back memories of France. A figure rose as we entered, and I saw that it was a young officer of the Chasseurs Alpins, with an empty sleeve and a row of medals, and a fine hard face of Southern type, with black eyes and ruddy skin. The boy was hugging him round the waist, but when Madame de Thilloy presented him he stood straight and bowed formally, and gave me his hand with a cordial grasp.

"You have our D.S.O. besides all the others!" I said, glancing at his medals; and he smiled and answered, with just a touch of the South in the roll of his *r*'s:

"I am proud of that! I was in Flanders on the left of your troops in the April fighting."

He had his one arm round the boy now, and we chatted a little together.

Meanwhile Madame de Thilloy brought out some wine and filled three glasses.

"Charles, my child," she said, "go and wash your face and hands. They are enormously dirty."

But Charles protested.

"Maman, let me have some wine, too, on this day of the Victory March!"

I saw her hesitate, looking at her boy with thoughtful eyes. The French lieutenant laughed and smoothed the lad's hair.

"Why not? It will do him no harm to take a sip."

"The smallest drop!" said Madame de Thilloy, and she poured out a little wine into a fourth glass. It was the lieutenant who raised his first and proposed a toast.

"A notre belle victoire!"

We clinked glasses and drank, remembering the years of horror.

"A la France!" I said next, and both Lieutenant Méricourt and Madame de Thilloy answered by raising their glasses to me and saying very solemnly, *"A nos Alliés!"*

Then it was the turn of Charles, and drinking before he gave the toast with a great gulp of his little drop of wine, he raised his glass like a Laughing Cavalier, and shouted, "*A bas les Boches!*"

I laughed at that, and so did the lieutenant, who repeated the words and drank the toast; but I saw that Madame de Thilloy put her glass down and did not drink. She saw that I noticed that, for she turned to me with a quick smile and gave me an explanation.

"Let us not think of the enemy today! Let us remember only our heroes, alive and dead!"

I liked her for that. There was no need now to say, *"A bas les Boches!"* They were down and out, and remembering their own dead and their irretrievable ruin without consolation of any kind. In the hour of great victory we could afford to be chivalrous even to Germans.

During that hour I stayed with Madame de Thilloy I noticed two things which made me wonder a little about the meaning of this girl's life. I noticed—it was impossible not to see so plain a thing—the adoration of the French lieutenant for this lady. There was a homage in his eyes, which followed her about the room whenever she moved. It was indeed more than homage. It was a spiritual hunger. The man desired this woman's love so that the sound of her voice was music to him and every gesture she made was a beauty in his eyes. But he called her always madame, and spoke with a reverence and courtesy that disproved any notion I may have had that they were lovers, accepted and acknowledged. The second thing that intrigued me somewhat was the absence of any photograph of this woman's husband. My gaze roved about the mantel-shelf for the usual portrait of a French soldier—officer or *poilu*—draped in the tricolour, as in so many homes of France where women waited for their men,

or on such a day as this gazed at the image of one of those martyrs who had died for France. It was not on the mantel-shelf or in any corner of the room.

While the lieutenant told some story of the war my mind wandered down byways of imagination in that absurd way which most minds have, almost subconsciously, of tracking down a thought to fanciful conclusions.

"This girl's husband is a bad hat," I thought. "Perhaps he ran off with some other woman in the war. Or perhaps he was a coward or a traitor who has disgraced his name. A traitor! Yes, that would account for what the old *concierge* said about the boy. 'It's a pity he was ever born!' That would be horrible. To be the wife of a man shot as a traitor, like that fellow Bolo. Still, of course, it may be the other way round. Perhaps Madame de Thilloy was not as faithful as she might have been, and now is conscience-stricken at the thought of the dead man, who, being dead, knows her guilt. No, that is ridiculous and caddish. What right have I to build up theories about this poor girl? How one's brain busies itself with other people's affairs!"

After that evening on the fête day of victory I became a frequent guest in the little *salon* of Madame de Thilloy, owing to the devotion of young Charles, who shared me in his affection,

it seemed, with his heroic lieutenant. Together we fought the Battle of the Marne and many bloody episodes of trench warfare on the polished boards of his mother's sitting-room with the little lead soldiers who had astounding qualities of courage and *élan;* and on sunny afternoons we stood watching the antics of Polichinelle—the French Punch—in the Champs-Elysées, or went for piratical voyages on the lake of the Bois de Boulogne which ended happily with rose-tinted ices on the Ile des Chalets. Sometimes the Lieutenant Méricourt joined these expeditions, and I came to like that Chasseur Alpin with an empty sleeve. He was a gay-hearted fellow, with something of the spirit of those old troubadours of Provence whose poetry he knew by heart and recited with a tenderness and passion which made it live again. He was always singing little old songs of France, to the great joy of young Charles; and sometimes, but not often, he told stories of his adventures in the war. That was when Charles pleaded hard with him.

"*Mon lieutenant,* tell me of how you captured the château of Vermelles. As a great treat, *mon lieutenant!*"

"No, no, Charles, let me forget the smell of blood and the sight of dead men! War is a dirty business—idiotic!"

"But I want to hear how you fought the Germans with the marble Venus."

"Poor lady! She was a figure of love, not made for such a scene as that. I will tell you the tale of *Le Chat Botté.*"

"No, no *mon lieutenant!* Please! I want to hear about the fat Germans sticking halfway through the ceiling, and how they squealed when your men poked them with bayonets."

The lieutenant turned to me when the boy pleaded like that, and laughed in a comical way.

"Youth is very bloodthirsty! How are we going to kill the spirit of war in the human heart? You see, even now, so soon after the massacre which has destroyed the best blood of Europe, young ears listen to the tales of war as though they were the exploits of Jack the Giant Killer!"

"Better than that, *mon lieutenant!*" cried Charles. "I like the true tales best. Tell us about the château of Vermelles."

So, spilling a little wine on the wooden table under the trees on the Ile des Chalets, that flower-strewn isle on the lake of the Bois, Armand Méricourt made a map of Vermelles, with the French lines round the village and the château in the centre of the German stronghold.

"I was here with my company. We had a

machine gun behind some sand-bags, but we had to keep our heads down, I can tell you, because the Germans had snipers in the windows of the château, five hundred yards away, and killed any man who showed his pate for a single second. I had eight men killed like that, and their bodies lay unburied among us for three days, and we watched their faces go black and their bodies swell out in the heat. Not amusing, that, my little one!"

Not amusing, but terribly thrilling to young Charles, who listened with his mouth open, drinking in this tale.

"We were preparing a mine to blow up the garden wall before an assault on the château. You remember I have told you how we fought through the little gardens and from wall to wall before we reached the outskirts of the small place in which the red-brick château stood. Many of my poor comrades had fallen and at night we could hear the wounded crying and groaning, where many of them lay half-buried under piles of bricks and earth flung on top of them by shell-fire. Not good sounds to hear at night above the chatter of the *mitrailleuses!*"

Not good sounds, but the boy Charles made a tattoo on the wooden table with his finger-nails to imitate machine-gun fire.

"The château was stuffed with German ma-

chine guns. All day and all night they swept the little *place,* and I knew that when we made our hole through the wall it was my job to cross that *place* with my company and lead the assault on the château. *'C'est drôle, ça,'* I said to myself a thousand times. 'Tomorrow I shall be dead. Today I am alive. I am very thirsty. These two hands of mine——' "

"One hand," said Charles.

"Two hands, my little one. It was before I lost my arm. 'These two hands of mine can touch, press the trigger of a machine gun, obey every direction of my brain. Tomorrow, when I cross that *sacrée place,* they will be like the hands of that dead body sticking out of loose earth a yard away from where I stand alive—limp, leathery, dead. That is queer,' I thought. 'It is also damnable.' "

"Were you frightened?" asked Charles.

"Enormously frightened," answered the Lieutenant Méricourt, and this confession of a great hero thrilled the boy with a kind of exquisite horror.

"It was at eleven o'clock in the morning that we mined the wall. It went up with a roar and a cloud of red brick-dust. 'Come on, you imbeciles!' I shouted to my men—they loved me to call them imbeciles—and, as mad as devils, we made a rush into the *place,* where the red château stood with shell-holes in its

walls and sand-bags in its windows, and *mitrailleuses* lashing the ground about us with wicked little bullets."

"What happened then?" asked Charles, who had heard this story before and knew exactly what happened.

"A funny little thing happened," said the Chasseur Alpin, forgetting the boy a little and speaking to me, with sombre eyes in which was the memory of a *mauvais quart d'heure*. "A German officer, seeing the mine explosion, came rushing out of the château with some machine gunners to stop our way through the wall, but before he could get his gun into action we were on him with our bayonets. The fool had left the château door open, and that gave us our chance. We made a dash for that open door. I think it was fear that made us make for it, to get cover from the *mitrailleuses*, which were vomiting lead about us. I had a pain like a red-hot poker through my right arm, and I remember cursing with the foulest words. And I remember seeing some of my men bowled over like rabbits as they ran. And after that I remembered nothing until I was inside the drawing-room of the château with half a dozen lads. We panted there like pigs, and there was a strange silence in the room except for that hard breathing. It was a well-furnished room, with a piano in the corner and some plush-

covered chairs torn by rifle fire and covered with plaster which had fallen from the ceiling, leaving only the naked laths up there. And in one corner of the room was a wooden pedestal with a figure of Venus on it, in white marble, unbroken."

The boy Charles drew a deep breath and smiled at this mention of the marble Venus. It was the choicest thrill of the story.

"Upstairs there was the noise of men's voices —German voices—shouting and cursing. I think they had found out we were in the house. We let them know for certain. I fired my revolver through the ceiling, and heard the cry of a wounded man. Then my men smashed the laths with the butt ends of their rifles. Two of them stood on the sofa to reach the ceiling better. The laths gave way, and some Germans came through half-and-half, with their legs dangling.

"They were screaming, and my men laughed when they stuck them with bayonets. It was very comical. I was laughing like a madman —you know how it is in war—when the whole ceiling came down, and a dozen Germans fell on top of us.

"It is difficult to remember details, monsieur. It is a little like a dream afterward—a nightmare. I remember that one of my lads had his nose bitten off by a German who was on top

of him, and another, a Breton, strangled a big German with his two thumbs on the windpipe, which made a strange, gurgling noise. I had lost my revolver when the ceiling came down, and had no weapon. It was then that I seized the marble Venus with my left hand. You remember, I told you of that pain in my right arm, like a red-hot poker? It was a good thing, that white Venus, hard and handy. I held her by the legs and brained a German who sprang at my throat. After that, two more. Then the Venus broke in half, and I was at the mercy of a German officer who stood by the open door of the little *salon* with an automatic pistol which covered me. I had not seen him before, but now I stared into his eyes and made ready to spring at him. Suddenly he dropped his pistol, and before he could stoop to pick it up I had my foot on it. He spoke to me in French.

" 'It is strange to meet here, Armand Méricourt.'

"I stared at him again, and said, 'Who are you, *Schweinhund?*' "

" 'Once we were friends,' he said, and I remembered him as a man I had known in Dresden before the war, when I was studying music.

" 'Now,' I said, 'we are not friends, and I am going to kill you.' "

"But you did not kill him!" said Charles.

"No, he was too quick for me. He turned from the door and ran down a passage which led to the garden of the château. He was the only German who escaped alive from the château of Vermelles. I am sorry he escaped."

"So am I," said Charles. "But it is a splendid story."

Armand Méricourt touched his empty sleeve.

"It cost me that."

"Queer coincidence, meeting that German at such a time!" I said. "What was his name?"

"I have forgotten his name."

He put his one arm round the boy Charles, who snuggled close to him adoringly, and said tenderly: "Sometimes I wish to forget all those years of war as completely as I have forgotten that man's name. Peace is better, cleaner, more beautiful, here on the Ile des Chalets, with roses in bloom, and boys making love to their girls, and white clouds that are prettier than the smoke of shell fire."

I know now that he remembered the German's name as well as that scene in the château of Vermelles. It was Madame de Thilloy who told me the name a few nights later, when I sat with her alone, after the boy had gone to bed.

We had been playing a game of cards together for the amusement of Charles, and I noticed that the girl's hand trembled when she played, and that once when there was a knock

at the door she let all her cards fall, to the great disgust of Charles, and stared toward the door with a panic look.

It was only the postman, but that she was suffering from a sense of fear I knew when I rose to take my leave, as soon as Charles had gone off to his room.

"Stay with me a little while," she said; and then in a pitiful way, "I am frightened."

The confession was so abrupt that I was startled, and more alarmed when suddenly she lost control of her nerves and wept with most passionate grief. I could do nothing but utter silly, soothing words, with the awkwardness of an Englishman at such a time, and presently she gained some self-control and begged me to pardon her for such lack of dignity, such foolishness.

I lit a cigarette and chatted about small things, while she mopped her eyes, and then mentioned Armand Méricourt and his wonderful story of the château of Vermelles, and his strange meeting with the German he had known in Dresden.

"It's a pity he has forgotten the man's name," I remarked to keep the conversation going.

"He has not forgotten," said Madame de Thilloy, "and I will tell you."

She spoke with a curious emphasis which

gave her words a sense of tragedy, though why I could not guess.

"His name," she said, with a quick indrawing of breath, "is Franz von Mürren. He is my husband, and the father of Charles."

I confess that I was dumbfounded by these words, and could think of nothing on earth to say except some foolish murmur of "Really!" or "Good gracious!" which did not meet the case at all.

"You know his name?" asked Madame de Thilloy more calmly, after her astonishing confession. "He was a famous singer before the war."

Yes, I remembered then. He had taken London by storm at Covent Garden as Lohengrin, on a gala night, when the King and Queen were there. A young, tall man with blue eyes and a handsome, boyish face. His portrait had been in all the picture papers. He had been interviewed a score of times. He was lionised in London society before going abroad again to many capitals of Europe.

That evening in the little *salon* Madame de Thilloy, as she called herself now by her maiden name, told me with wonderful candour and simplicity the story of how this young German had fallen in love with her and she with him. She did not deny her love for him in those days when she had been a pupil of his, or

the happiness of their married life when for three years before the war she had travelled with him, and then, before another season of opera which never came because the drums of death played other music in the world, lived with him in a big old house at Auteuil, beyond the roar of Paris.

"That was the house that Charles remembers," I said; and Madame de Thilloy nodded and smiled a little.

"Yes, his dream house with the big clock in the hall and the winding stairs as high as the Eiffel Tower."

"And the man who sang old songs in a voice like the organ of the Madeleine."

I think the most pitiful thing in Madame de Thilloy's narrative was the memory of the love that still came pressing back into her heart for this German husband whom she had abandoned forever. He had adored her, it was clear, and there had been no harsh word between them until that day when she implored him not to go back to Germany and fight against France. They had had a frightful scene. The man had wept more than the woman, cursing war, protesting to God against the abomination that was coming upon the world, and yet giving his wife no hope that he would desert his country.

"I am a German," he said over and over again. "I must go back, and, if need be, fight

for my Fatherland. I am a German! I cannot escape from my duty!"

"But you may have to kill my brothers!" his wife had cried out.

"Your brothers may kill me," he had answered. "The boyhood of France and Germany will die in the same shambles."

They had argued, quarrelled and wept again. Then Franz von Mürren had to go, because an *agent de police* came to see him in the last train to Basel. He had embraced the baby, Charles, but his wife, Suzanne, had not embraced him in that last moment. She had called him the enemy of her country, and though he struggled to kiss her hands she would not let him until she fell into a swoon. A tragic scene that was happening in more rooms than one in the world that night on the outbreak of war! The rest had followed—the invasion of Belgium, the atrocity stories, the slaughter of French youth; and Suzanne, who called herself De Thilloy—her maiden name—hated the memory of her German husband with the shuddering aversion of all Frenchwomen—or most—for the race that had done such evil deeds. She had suffered in the years of war. Her two brothers had been killed, one on the Somme, one at Verdun, that greatest of graveyards.

"You had one comfort," I said. "You had little Charles."

I think only a Frenchwoman would have revealed another cause of tragedy so frankly and with such an intimate knowledge of her own psychology as this lady did to me. Little Charles had been an agony and not a comfort to her. Her very love for him was like a poisoned dagger in her heart. As he grew older she could see the German in him getting stronger, unmistakable. Nothing would alter his blue eyes and his fair hair; nothing would alter a hundred little traits of character, of manner, even of speech, in which she saw—or fancied she saw, poor soul—the blood and spirit of the German race. He ate his soup like a German—I told her that all children do. He had a habit of sudden rages. He laughed like a German, had a passion for music—"Nothing wrong in that!" I said—and was Teutonic in a way that frightened her.

"Sometimes," she told me, "I see in him a miniature Boche, the little incarnation of the German race, and it makes my heart swoon."

"Nerves!" I said. "Morbid psychology, madame. Charles is French to his finger-tips, crazy about *la gloire de France,* and the noblest boy for his age I have ever met on this side of the Channel."

She shook her head miserably.

"I should love him better if he had dark eyes, like Armand Méricourt."

I think those words slipped out before she knew she was speaking them, for instantly they left her lips she blushed very deeply. When I rose to go she told me something else which startled me as much as her first confession of a German husband.

"Why were you frightened to be left alone?" I asked.

She hesitated before she answered, and then spoke in a low voice:

"I have told you so much that I may now tell you all. That man who was my husband is in Paris. He is one of the secretaries of the Peace Commission. It is certain that he will try to find me."

I was silent at this piece of news.

"You will never go back to him?" I asked.

"I would die rather!" she told me, and there was a thrill of passion in her voice. One must have been in France during the years of war to understand the mentality of this lady. One must have seen the flame of hatred in the soul of France for all that was German. I think an English wife of a German husband would have kept her love for him, if she had loved him, in spite of the brutalities of war, and would have seen the tragedy of the conflict with a wider pity for its victims on both sides,

with loyalty to England and yet with fidelity to her man and recognition of his own sense of duty and honour. Indeed, I know women of England who had to face that frightful problem of double allegiance, and who rose above the limiting ideal of national hatred. In France, invaded, outraged, martyred, it was more difficult, almost beyond human nature. Yet my own view is that the love of two human beings should be sacred even in the passion of a conflict dividing their peoples to the death, if they are truly mated; though I admit that "if" begs half the question.

During the next few days Madame de Thilloy had no need of my company, I found, for Armand Méricourt, the Chasseur Alpin, spent many hours in her *salon*, with the boy as a third party.

I think the lieutenant was pleading with her for a final abandonment of her German husband and for a new scheme of life by which his own dream would be fulfilled. So much I guessed from the prattle of young Charles, whom I met in the courtyard, and who told me that his lieutenant was very angry with *maman* because she would not go and play with him in his house at Tours.

"He thinks it is *idiot* of *maman* to stay here forever, when his heart is hungry for her in that château which is empty. That is what my

lieutenant said, though I do not understand how his heart is hungry at Tours while his body is here and quite well fed. I think it is poetry he is speaking."

I thought so, too, and I pitied the poet heart of the man who had been through hell in war and now wanted joy in peace.

Charles spent an afternoon in my rooms while his mother and the lieutenant went driving in the Bois, and it was after a game of dominoes that there was a knock at the door.

"Come with me, Charles," I said, "and I will see what the postman brings today."

But it was not the postman. When I opened the door, while Charles held my hand, I saw a tall young man outside, whose face seemed vaguely known to me—a handsome face, blue-eyed and rather English-looking. He lifted his hat and spoke in almost perfect French, perfect except for a slightly heavy *r*. He seemed very nervous and agitated.

"Pardon me—does a lady named Madame de Thilloy live here?"

I guessed at once that it was Franz von Mürren. His wife had prepared me for that, though not for this coming to my own door. Before I could answer him his gaze had fallen on the child, and a bright, eager look came into his face.

"Is it possible?" he said in a kind of whisper. Then he gave a queer cry, and said: "Charles! My little son. Oh, my dear baby, grown so tall, so big!"

Before I could speak he had lifted the boy to his heart and kissed him a dozen times greedily, while tears streamed down his face. The boy was frightened. He struggled out of the man's arms and then took cover behind me. Franz von Mürren called to him:

"Charles, my son, do not be afraid! I am the father who went away from you when the war began. I have come back again."

"My father is dead," said Charles. Then something, I think, stirred in the child's memory, some face dimly remembered as in a dream, and he asked a queer question: "Are you the man who sang with an organ voice?"

"Yes," said Franz von Mürren. "The father who sang you to sleep with old lullabies."

It was then that I stepped between the father and son.

"Sir," I said, "this child is in my care for a little while, and his mother has not given me permission to let him talk with—with—visitors."

I remember stammering out the words, afraid of hurting the man, this man who had come back, yet thinking of what Madame de Thilloy would say when she came home again.

"He is my son," said the man simply. "His mother is my very dear wife. I have long been parted from her by this tragic war."

"Are you really my father?" asked Charles. "Have you come alive again?"

"Yes," said Franz von Mürren, "I have come back to life."

How could I keep this man from his son when I could see that his whole soul was stirred to joy by the sight of the child? What right had I to step in between them? None in the world, I thought, and still think.

Yet, knowing the hatred of the boy's mother for this German husband, I was put into a very grave predicament, for I owed some loyalty to her, having been left with her child in trust, as it were.

At that moment I heard the laughter of Armand Méricourt at the bottom of the staircase, and guessed that Madame de Thilloy was with him. I shrank from the really tragic thought that a meeting between this husband and wife should happen without warning, and with the Chasseur Alpin and myself as onlookers. I spoke sharply to the boy:

"Charles, run downstairs! Tell the lieutenant I am here!"

The boy was startled by my sudden command, and ran as I bade him, with a cry of *"Mon lieutenant!"* I think he wanted to tell

his hero this wonderful news of the father who had come back, but I did not think then of its effect upon that Frenchman.

I spoke to Franz von Mürren:

"Come inside, sir, I beg of you."

He stepped farther into the passage, and I shut the door behind him and led him to my room.

So we stood face to face, and I remember now the anguish in the man's eyes, startled by my action of sending the boy away, and guessing a little, perhaps, the near presence of his wife.

"You are English, are you not?" he said, speaking in my own tongue. "May I ask what you have to do with my wife and boy?"

"I am a mere friend," I answered. "But your wife has told me something of her life."

"Then you know that I am German?" he said.

"Yes, I know."

He was silent for a moment, thinking deeply. He seemed like a man who sees all his life outspread, as men say the drowning do.

"This war," he said—and I was struck by the beauty of his speaking voice and remembered his fame as a singer—"this tragic war has not made it good to be a German in France or England. In my case it has been the worst of tragedies, for it made me the enemy of my

wife's people. But all through these years I have lived with the hope of finding her love again, of seeing her dear beauty, which is my life, and devoting all the years I may have to her happiness. Do you know my wife well enough to tell me whether the man she once loved may hope for that?"

The wistfulness of these words, their humiliation, touched me poignantly.

"She has not written to you?" I asked.

"For five years I have had no word—nor any of my friends."

"It was difficult for you to hear," I said.

"Difficult, yes, but not impossible."

He waited for me to give him some hope, and I cast about in my mind for some vague, non-committal words which might give him faint consolation. All my pity was for this German now, and the spectres of the war did not stir my hatred. A stricken soul seems to me above all racial enmities. I spoke to him again:

"I don't know your wife very well; not well enough to give you any answer to your question. But if you'll wait here I'll go and see her and take a message, and bring back her reply."

He accepted this like a hungry dog to whom a bone is thrown.

"Tell her this," he said: "'I die without

you. My love cries out for you. In the name of God, who made us man and wife, I beg you to see me again.' "

I left him standing there and went across the outside passage to the door opposite my own. When I knocked it was Armand Méricourt who opened it. There was an unusual pallor beneath the bronze of his skin, and his dark eyes were sombre.

"Has that *sacré Boche* gone?" he asked.

"Not yet. I have a message for his wife."

He swore a frightful oath, but stood by while I passed into the little *salon.*

Madame de Thilloy stood close to the table, white to the lips, and waited for me to speak. Charles held to her frock. He looked frightened and was quite silent. Some tragic scene had happened before I came.

"I have a message, madame, from your husband," I said. "Have I your permission to give it before Lieutenant Méricourt and little Charles?"

She nodded, but did not speak.

I repeated the words of Franz von Mürren exactly as I remembered them.

"He says, 'I die without you. My love cries out for you. In the name of God, who made us man and wife, I beg you to see me.' "

Madame de Thilloy, as she was called,

raised her hands and put them up to her face, and I thought she was near swooning.

It was Armand Méricourt who spoke first after my message.

"Tell this Boche," he said savagely, "that his Kaiser broke all contracts made by God and man between French and Germans. He is no longer the husband of this lady."

I turned to Madame de Thilloy and spoke to her gently:

"Shall I take back your answer, madame?"

She tried to speak and failed, and then broke into spasms of weeping. Charles stroked her hand, but I think she was unconscious of that touch. It was Armand Méricourt who spoke again:

"There is an easy way and a good answer. I will go and kill the man, and finish what I left undone in the château of Vermelles."

He took his revolver from its case and slouched toward the door. I am certain that he intended to fulfil his words.

"Not in my room!" I said, and stood between him and the door.

"You, too," growled this Chasseur Alpin, "if you stand in my way!"

I'm certain he meant that also, and I was very near death that moment. Then Madame de Thilloy spoke:

"I will go and see this man."

She put her hand on my arm, and the Chasseur Alpin fell back before her and let us pass. I think he was cowed by the tragedy of her face, so white, so ghostly.

My little door on the other side of the passage was locked by the click of the patent catch, and I remember fumbling with the key before I could get it open.

Franz von Mürren stood just inside the door of the small room, and the light from the gas overhead in the passage fell on his face.

It brought back to my mind the figure of Lohengrin as I had seen him on a gala night at Covent Garden. He took one step forward, with a wonderful look of joy, and then stood still and spoke her name:

"Suzanne! *Ma femme!*"

She answered him coldly:

"What is it you want with me?"

I heard no more than that, for I passed quickly by the lady and turned into a little hall on the left, and shut the door between them and me.

I think she stayed with him no more than ten minutes though I cannot be sure. I heard the murmur of their voices, the man's voice passionate and pleading, the woman's cold and hard. Then silence. Then the click of the latch and the shutting of my front door.

I went into the passage. Inside the room

Franz von Mürren sat at my table with his head on his arms, weeping. I left him there until some time later I heard his footsteps in a stumbling way across the passage. He too went out, and my door closed again with the click of the patent catch, and I was alone with a sense of tragedy.

I have never seen Madame de Thilloy since. She left the house in the Rue de la Pompe next morning early with her boy Charles, and from the *concierge* I learned that they had gone away from Paris. I wondered whether they had gone to Tours, and hoped not. For the sake of the bleeding heart of Franz von Mürren, German as he was, I hoped not, as well as for the soul of Suzanne de Thilloy, who once had loved him.

For her I am sure there would be no real happiness in a château at Tours with that husband's love between her and a Chasseur Alpin.

It was Armand Méricourt who told me the end of the tale when I met him a few days ago at Chartres.

He held out his hand and said, *"Comment ça va, mon vieux?"* and then invited me to an *apéritif*.

For some time we spoke of casual things. Not a word about the lady who was in both our minds.

Then abruptly he told me what I wanted most to know.

"Madame de Thilloy—you remember?—went back to her Boche husband. They are living in Italy. He fell ill in Switzerland and she nursed him back to life. I think she always loved him, even when she hated him. Women are like that."

I remembered young Charles using that phrase.

"Women are like that," he said once, making me laugh. Perhaps he had learned it from his lieutenant.

Armand Méricourt took another sip of his *apéritif*.

"It's a pity I didn't kill him in the château at Vermelles," he said in his quiet way.

I was silent, thinking of this man's devotion to Suzanne de Thilloy, and feeling sorry for him.

"Or rather," he said presently, continuing his thought, "it's a pity he didn't kill me. I'm finished—anyhow."

We spoke no more on that subject, but talked of the war and of the peace. The lieutenant of Chasseurs Alpins cursed both with very dreadful oaths.

WHITE

RING W. LARDNER

FOREWORD

"I CAN'T BREATHE" is my favorite author's favorite story chiefly because it was written in less than seven hours. (Catcalls and cries of "What delayed you?") A jury composed of all the great magazine editors in the world would probably vote that it wasn't much of a story, but if this same jury were laid end to end, they would fall nearly ten blocks short of reaching from Thirty-third Street to Times Square.

But honestly I received a letter from a female writer in Havana asking permission to translate the story into Spanish and publish it all by itself in a little booklet. (Editor's note: Instead of a big booklet.) I granted the permission and I understand the booklet sold like electric fans in Grand Anse. The Señorita promised to split the royalties fifty-fifty and when my share arrives, I am going to walk down to the drug store and get weighed.

And another thing: Patterson McNutt, who was co-author of "Pigs" and who produced "The Poor Nut," said he thought "I Can't Breathe" could be made into a successful comedy for Helen Hayes, and he had in mind just the man to write the stage version. He would see Miss Hayes and the playwright and find out whether they were interested. This was a year and a half ago, so I guess they weren't.

I CAN'T BREATHE

By Ring W. Lardner

July 12

I am staying here at the Inn for two weeks with my Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule and I think I will keep a kind of a diary while I am here to help pass the time and so I can have a record of things that happen though goodness knows there isn't lightly to anything happen, that is anything exciting with Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule making the plans as they are both at least 35 years old and maybe older.

Dad and mother are abroad to be gone a month and me coming here is supposed to be a recompence for them not taking me with them. A fine recompence to be left with old people that come to a place like this to rest. Still it would be a heavenly place under different conditions, for instance if Walter were here, too. It would be heavenly if he were here, the very thought of it makes my heart stop.

I can't stand it. I won't think about it.

This is our first separation since we have

been engaged, nearly 17 days. It will be 17 days tomorrow. And the hotel orchestra at dinner this evening played that old thing "Oh how I miss you tonight" and it seemed as if they must be playing it for my benefit though of course the person in that song is talking about how they miss their mother though of course I miss mother too, but a person gets used to missing their mother and it isn't like Walter or the person you are engaged to.

But there won't be any more separations much longer, we are going to be married in December even if mother does laugh when I talk to her about it because she says I am crazy to even think of getting married at 18.

She got married herself when she was 18, but of course that was "different," she wasn't crazy like I am, she knew whom she was marrying. As if Walter were a policeman or a foreigner or something. And she says she was only engaged once while I have been engaged at least five times a year since I was 14, of course it really isn't as bad as that and I have really only been really what I call engaged six times altogether, but is getting engaged my fault when they keep insisting and hammering at you and if you didn't say yes they would never go home.

But it is different with Walter. I honestly believe if he had not asked me I would have

asked him. Of course I wouldn't have, but I would have died. And this is the first time I have ever been engaged to be really married. The other times when they talked about when should we get married I just laughed at them, but I hadn't been engaged to Walter ten minutes when he brought up the subject of marriage and I didn't laugh. I wouldn't be engaged to him unless it was to be married. I couldn't stand it.

Anyway mother may as well get used to the idea because it is "No Foolin' " this time and we have got our plans all made and I am going to be married at home and go out to California and Hollywood on our honeymoon. December, five months away. I can't stand it. I can't wait.

There were a couple of awfully nice looking boys sitting together alone in the dining-room tonight. One of them wasn't so much, but the other was cute. And he——

There's the dance orchestra playing "Always," what they played at the Biltmore the day I met Walter. "Not for just an hour, not for just a day." I can't live. I can't breathe.

JULY 13

This has been a much more exciting day than I expected under the circumstances. In the first place I got two long night letters, one

from Walter and one from Gordon Flint. I don't see how Walter ever had the nerve to send his, there was everything in it and it must have been horribly embarrassing for him while the telegraph operator was reading it over and counting the words to say nothing of embarrassing for the operator.

But the one from Gordon was a kind of a shock. He just got back from a trip around the world, left last December to go on it and got back yesterday and called up our house and Helga gave him my address, and his telegram, well it was nearly as bad as Walter's. The trouble is that Gordon and I were engaged when he went away, or at least he thought so and he wrote to me right along all the time he was away and sent cables and things and for a while I answered his letters, but then I lost track of his itinery and couldn't write to him any more and when I got really engaged to Walter I couldn't let Gordon know because I had no idea where he was besides not wanting to spoil his trip.

And now he still thinks we are engaged and he is going to call me up tomorrow from Chicago and how in the world can I explain things and get him to understand because he is really serious and I like him ever and ever so much and in lots of ways he is nicer than Walter, not really nicer but better looking and there is

no comparison between their dancing. Walter simply can't learn to dance, that is really dance. He says it is because he is flat footed, he says that as a joke, but it is true and I wish to heavens it wasn't.

All forenoon I thought and thought and thought about what to say to Gordon when he calls up and finally I couldn't stand thinking about it any more and just made up my mind I wouldn't think about it any more. But I will tell him the truth though it will kill me to hurt him.

I went down to lunch with Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule and they were going out to play golf this afternoon and were insisting that I go with them, but I told them I had a headache and then I had a terrible time getting them to go without me. I didn't have a headache at all and just wanted to be alone to think about Walter and besides when you play with Uncle Nat he is always correcting your stance or your swing or something and always puts his hands on my arms or shoulders to show me the right way and I can't stand it to have old men touch me, even if they are your uncle.

I finally got rid of them and I was sitting watching the tennis when that boy that I saw last night, the cute one, came and sat right next to me and of course I didn't look at him and I was going to smoke a cigarette and found

I had left my lighter upstairs and I started to get up and go after it when all of a sudden he was offering me his lighter and I couldn't very well refuse it without being rude. So we got to talking and he is even cuter than he looks, the most original and wittiest person I believe I ever met and I haven't laughed so much in I don't know how long.

For one thing he asked me if I had heard Rockefeller's song and I said no and he began singing "Oil alone." Then he asked me if I knew the orange juice song and I told him no again and he said it was "Orange juice sorry you made me cry." I was in hysterics before we had been together ten minutes.

His name is Frank Caswell and he has been out of Dartmouth a year and is 24 years old. That isn't so terribly old, only two years older than Walter and three years older than Gordon. I hate the name Frank, but Caswell is all right and he is so cute.

He was out in California last winter and visited Hollywood and met everybody in the world and it is fascinating to listen to him. He met Norma Shearer and he said he thought she was the prettiest thing he had ever seen. What he said was "I *did* think she was the prettiest girl in the world, till today." I was going to pretend I didn't get it, but I finally

told him to be sensible or I would never be able to believe anything he said.

Well, he wanted me to dance with him tonight after dinner and the next question was how to explain how we had met each other to Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule. Frank said he would fix that all right and sure enough he got himself introduced to Uncle Nat when Uncle Nat came in from golf and after dinner Uncle Nat introduced him to me and Aunt Jule too and we danced together all evening, that is not Aunt Jule. They went to bed, thank heavens.

He is a heavenly dancer, as good as Gordon. One dance we were dancing and for one of the encores the orchestra played "In a cottage small by a waterfall" and I simply couldn't dance to it. I just stopped still and said "Listen, I can't bear it, I can't breathe" and poor Frank thought I was sick or something and I had to explain that that was the tune the orchestra played the night I sat at the next table to Jack Barrymore at Barney Gallant's.

I made him sit out that encore and wouldn't let him talk till they got through playing it. Then they played something else and I was all right again and Frank told me about meeting Jack Barrymore. Imagine meeting him. I couldn't live.

I promised Aunt Jule I would go to bed at eleven and it is way past that now, but I am

all ready for bed and have just been writing this. Tomorrow Gordon is going to call up and what will I say to him? I just won't think about it.

JULY 14

Gordon called up this morning from Chicago and it was wonderful to hear his voice again though the connection was terrible. He asked me if I still loved him and I tried to tell him no, but I knew that would mean an explanation and the connection was so bad that I never could make him understand so I said yes, but I almost whispered it purposely, thinking he wouldn't hear me, but he heard me all right and he said that made everything all right with the world. He said he thought I had stopped loving him because I had stopped writing.

I wish the connection had been decent and I could have told him how things were, but now it is terrible because he is planning to get to New York the day I get there and heaven knows what I will do because Walter will be there, too. I just won't think about it.

Aunt Jule came in my room just after I was through talking to Gordon, thank heavens. The room was full of flowers. Walter had sent me some and so had Frank. I got another long night letter from Walter, just as silly as the first one. I wish he would say those

things in letters instead of night letters so everybody in the world wouldn't see them. Aunt Jule wanted me to read it aloud to her. I would have died.

While she was still in the room, Frank called up and asked me to play golf with him and I said all right and Aunt Jule said she was glad my headache was gone. She was trying to be funny.

I played golf with Frank this afternoon. He is a beautiful golfer and it is thrilling to watch him drive, his swing is so much more graceful than Walter's. I asked him to watch me swing and tell me what was the matter with me, but he said he couldn't look at anything but my face and there wasn't anything the matter with that.

He told me the boy who was here with him had been called home and he was glad of it because I might have liked him, the other boy, better than himself. I told him that couldn't be possible and he asked me if I really meant that and I said of course, but I smiled when I said it so he wouldn't take it too seriously.

We danced again tonight and Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule sat with us a while and danced a couple of dances themselves, but they were really there to get better acquainted with Frank and see if he was all right for me to be with. I know they certainly couldn't have enjoyed

their own dancing, no old people really can enjoy it because they can't really *do* anything.

They were favorably impressed with Frank I think, at least Aunt Jule didn't say I must be in bed at eleven, but just not to stay up too late. I guess it is a big surprise to a girl's parents and aunts and uncles to find out that the boys you go around with are all right, they always seem to think that if I seem to like somebody and the person pays a little attention to me, why he must be a convict or a policeman or a drunkard or something queer.

Frank had some more songs for me tonight. He asked me if I knew the asthma song and I said I didn't and he said "Oh, you must know that. It goes yes, sir, asthma baby." Then he told me about the underwear song, "I underwear my baby is tonight." He keeps you in hysterics and yet he has his serious side, in fact, he was awfully serious when he said good night to me and his eyes simply shown. I wish Walter were more like him in some ways, but I mustn't think about that.

JULY 15

I simply can't live and I know I'll never sleep tonight. I am in a terrible predicament or rather I won't know whether I really am or not till tomorrow and that is what makes it so terrible.

After we had danced two or three dances, Frank asked me to go for a ride with him and we went for a ride in his car and he had had some cocktails and during the ride he had some drinks out of a flask and finally he told me he loved me and I said not to be silly, but he said he was perfectly serious and he certainly acted that way. He asked me if I loved anybody else and I said yes and he asked if I didn't love him more than anybody else and I said yes, but only because I thought he had probably had too much to drink and wouldn't remember it anyway and the best thing to do was humor him under the circumstances.

Then all of a sudden he asked me when I could marry him and I said, just as a joke, that I couldn't possible marry him before December. He said that was a long time to wait, but I was certainly worth waiting for and he said a lot of other things and maybe I humored him a little too much, but that is just the trouble, I don't know.

I was absolutely sure he was tight and would forget the whole thing, but that was early in the evening, and when we said good night he was a whole lot more sober than he had been and now I am not sure how it stands. If he doesn't remember anything about it, of course I am all right. But if he does remember and if he took me seriously, I will simply have to tell

him about Walter and maybe about Gordon, too. And it isn't going to be easy. The suspense is what is maddening and I know I'll never live through this night.

JULY 16

I can't stand it, I can't breathe, life is impossible. Frank remembered everything about last night and firmly believes we are engaged and going to be married in December. His people live in New York and he says he is going back when I do and have them meet me.

Of course it can't go on and tomorrow I will tell him about Walter or Gordon or both of them. I know it is going to hurt him terribly, perhaps spoil his life and I would give anything in the world not to have had it happen. I hate so to hurt him because he is so nice besides being so cute and attractive.

He sent me the loveliest flowers this morning and called up at ten and wanted to know how soon he could see me and I hope the girl wasn't listening in because the things he said were, well, like Walter's night letters.

And that is another terrible thing, today I didn't get a night letter from Walter, but there was a regular letter instead and I carried it around in my purse all this afternoon and evening and never remembered to read it till ten minutes ago when I came up in the room. Wal-

ter is worried because I have only sent him two telegrams and written him one letter since I have been here, he would be a lot more worried if he knew what has happened now, though of course it can't make any difference because he is the one I am really engaged to be married to and the one I told mother I was going to marry in December and I wouldn't dare tell her it was somebody else.

I met Frank for lunch and we went for a ride this afternoon and he was so much in love and so lovely to me that I simply did not have the heart to tell him the truth, I am surely going to tell him tomorrow and telling him today would have just meant one more day of unhappiness for both of us.

He said his people had plenty of money and his father had offered to take him into partnership and he might accept, but he thinks his true vocation is journalism with a view to eventually writing novels and if I was willing to undergo a few hardships just at first we would probably both be happier later on if he was doing something he really liked. I didn't know what to say, but finally I said I wanted him to suit himself and money wasn't everything.

He asked me where I would like to go on my honeymoon and I suppose I ought to have told him my honeymoon was all planned, that I was going to California, with Walter, but all I said

was that I had always wanted to go to California and he was enthusiastic and said that is where we would surely go and he would take me to Hollywood and introduce me to all those wonderful people he met there last winter. It nearly takes my breath away to think of it, going there with someone who really knows people and has the entrée.

We danced again tonight, just two or three dances, and then went out and sat in the tennis-court, but I came upstairs early because Aunt Jule had acted kind of funny at dinner. And I wanted to be alone, too, and think, but the more I think the worse it gets.

Sometimes I wish I were dead, maybe that is the only solution and it would be best for everyone concerned. I *will* die if things keep on the way they have been. But of course tomorrow it will be all over, with Frank I mean, for I must tell him the truth no matter how much it hurts us both. Though I don't care how much it hurts me. The thought of hurting him is what is driving me mad. I can't bear it.

JULY 18

I have skipped a day. I was busy every minute of yesterday and so exhausted when I came upstairs that I was tempted to fall into bed with all my clothes on. First Gordon called

me up from Chicago to remind me that he would be in New York the day I got there and that when he comes he wants me all to himself all the time and we can make plans for our wedding. The connection was bad again and I just couldn't explain to him about Walter.

I had an engagement with Frank for lunch and just as we were going in another long distance call came, from Walter this time. He wanted to know why I hadn't written more letters and sent him more telegrams and asked me if I still loved him and of course I told him yes because I really do. Then he asked if I had met any men here and I told him I had met one, a friend of Uncle Nat's. After all it was Uncle Nat who introduced me to Frank. He reminded me that he would be in New York on the 25th which is the day I expect to get home, and said he would have theater tickets for that night and we would go somewhere afterwards and dance.

Frank insisted on knowing who had kept me talking so long and I told him it was a boy I had known a long while, a very dear friend of mine and a friend of my family's. Frank was jealous and kept asking questions till I thought I would go mad. He was so serious and kind of cross and gruff that I gave up the plan of telling him the truth till some time when he is in better spirits.

I played golf with Frank in the afternoon and we took a ride last night and I wanted to get in early because I had promised both Walter and Gordon that I would write them long letters, but Frank wouldn't bring me back to the Inn till I had named a definite date in December. I finally told him the 10th and he said all right if I was sure that wasn't a Sunday. I said I would have to look it up, but as a matter of fact I know the 10th falls on a Friday because the date Walter and I have agreed on for our wedding is Saturday the 11th.

Today has just been the same thing over again two more night letters, a long distance call from Chicago, golf and a ride with Frank, and the room full of flowers. But tomorrow I am going to tell Frank and I am going to write Gordon a long letter and tell him, too, because this simply can't go on any longer. I can't breathe. I can't live.

JULY 21

I wrote to Gordon yesterday, but I didn't say anything about Walter because I don't think it is a thing a person ought to do by letter. I can tell him when he gets to New York and then I will be sure that he doesn't take it too hard and I can promise him that I will be friends with him always and make him promise not to do anything silly, while if I told it to him

in a letter there is no telling what he would do, there all alone.

And I haven't told Frank because he hasn't been feeling well, he is terribly sunburned and it hurts him terribly so he can hardly play golf or dance, and I want him to be feeling his best when I do tell him, but whether he is all right or not I simply must tell him tomorrow because he is actually planning to leave here on the same train with us Saturday night and I can't let him do that.

Life is so hopeless and it could be so wonderful. For instance how heavenly it would be if I could marry Frank first and stay married to him five years and he would be the one who would take me to Hollywood and maybe we could go on parties with Norman Kerry and Jack Barrymore and Buster Collier and Marion Davies and Lois Moran.

And at the end of five years Frank could go into journalism and write novels and I would only be 23 and I could marry Gordon and he would be ready for another trip around the world and he could show me things better than someone who had never seen them before.

Gordon and I would separate at the end of five years and I would be 28 and I know of lots of women that never even got married the first time till they were 28 though I don't suppose that was their fault, but I would marry Walter

then, for after all he is the one I really love and want to spend most of my life with and I wouldn't care whether he could dance or not when I was that old. Before long we would be as old as Uncle Nat and Aunt Jule and I certainly wouldn't want to dance at their age when all you can do is just hobble around the floor. But Walter is so wonderful as a companion and we would enjoy the same things and be pals and maybe we would begin to have children.

But that is all impossible though it wouldn't be if older people just had sense and would look at things the right way.

It is only half past ten, the earliest I have gone to bed in weeks, but I am worn out and Frank went to bed early so he could put cold cream on his sunburn.

Listen, diary, the orchestra is playing "Limehouse Blues." The first tune I danced to with Merle Oliver, two years ago. I can't stand it. And how funny that they should play that old tune tonight of all nights, when I have been thinking of Merle off and on all day, and I hadn't thought of him before in weeks and weeks. I wonder where he is, I wonder if it is just an accident or if it means I am going to see him again. I simply mustn't think about it or I'll die.

JULY 22

I knew it wasn't an accident. I knew it must mean something, and it did.

Merle is coming here today, here to this Inn, and just to see me. And there can only be one reason. And only one answer. I knew that when I heard his voice calling from Boston. How could I ever have thought I loved anyone else? How could he ever have thought I meant it when I told him I was engaged to George Morse?

A whole year and he still cares and I still care. That shows we were always intended for each other and for no one else. I won't make *him* wait till December. I doubt if we even wait till dad and mother get home. And as for a honeymoon I will go with him to Long Beach or the Bronx Zoo, wherever he wants to take me.

After all this is the best way out of it, the only way. I won't have to say anything to Frank, he will guess when he sees me with Merle. And when I get home Sunday and Walter and Gordon call me up, I will invite them both to dinner and Merle can tell them himself, with two of them there it will only hurt each one half as much as if they were alone.

The train is due at 2:40, almost three hours from now. I can't wait. And what if it should be late? I can't stand it.

RED

By W. Somerset Maugham

The skipper thrust his hand into one of his trousers pockets and with difficulty, for they were not at the sides but in front and he was a portly man, pulled out a large silver watch. He looked at it, and then looked again at the declining sun. The Kanaka at the wheel gave him a glance, but did not speak. The skipper's eyes rested on the island they were approaching. A white line of foam marked the reef. He knew there was an opening large enough to get his ship through, and when they came a little nearer he counted on seeing it. They had nearly an hour of daylight still before them. In the lagoon the water was deep and they could anchor comfortably. The chief of the village which he could already see among the coconut trees was a friend of the mate's, and it would be pleasant to go ashore for the night. The mate came

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forward at that minute and the skipper turned to him.

"We'll take a bottle of booze along with us and get some girls in to dance," he said.

"I don't see the opening," said the mate.

He was a Kanaka, a handsome, swarthy fellow, with somewhat the look of a later Roman emperor, inclined to stoutness; but his face was fine and clean-cut.

"I'm dead sure there's one right here," said the captain, looking through his glasses. "I can't understand why I can't pick it up. Send one of the boys up the mast to have a look."

The mate called one of the crew and gave him the order. The captain watched the Kanaka climb and waited for him to speak. But the Kanaka shouted down that he could see nothing but the unbroken line of foam. The captain spoke Samoan like a native, and he cursed him freely.

"Shall he stay up there?" asked the mate.

"What the hell good does that do?" answered the captain. "The blame fool can't see worth a cent. You bet your sweet life I'd find the opening if I was up there."

He looked at the slender mast with anger. It was all very well for a native who had been used to climbing up coconut trees all his life. He was fat and heavy.

"Come down," he shouted. "You're no

more use than a dead dog. We'll just have to go along the reef till we find the opening."

It was a seventy-ton schooner with paraffin auxiliary, and it ran, when there was no head wind, between four and five knots an hour. It was a bedraggled object; it had been painted white a very long time ago, but it was now dirty, dingy, and mottled. It smelt strongly of paraffin and of the copra which was its usual cargo. They were within a hundred feet of the reef now and the captain told the steersman to run along it till they came to the opening. But when they had gone a couple of miles he realised that they had missed it. He went about and slowly worked back again. The white foam of the reef continued without interruption and now the sun was setting. With a curse at the stupidity of the crew the skipper resigned himself to waiting till next morning.

"Put her about," he said. "I can't anchor here."

They went out to sea a little and presently it was quite dark. They anchored. When the sail was furled the ship began to roll a good deal. They said in Apia that one day she would roll right over; and the owner, a German-American who managed one of the largest stores, said that no money was big enough to induce him to go out in her. The cook, a Chinese in white trousers, very dirty and

ragged, and a thin white tunic, came to say that supper was ready, and when the skipper went into the cabin he found the engineer already seated at table. The engineer was a long, lean man with a scraggy neck. He was dressed in blue overalls and a sleeveless jersey which showed his thin arms tattooed from elbow to wrist.

"Hell, having to spend the night outside," said the skipper.

The engineer did not answer, and they ate their supper in silence. The cabin was lit by a dim oil lamp. When they had eaten the canned apricots with which the meal finished the Chink brought them a cup of tea. The skipper lit a cigar and went on the upper deck. The island now was only a darker mass against the night. The stars were very bright. The only sound was the ceaseless breaking of the surf. The skipper sank into a deck-chair and smoked idly. Presently three or four members of the crew came up and sat down. One of them had a banjo and another a concertina. They began to play, and one of them sang. The native song sounded strange on these instruments. Then to the singing a couple began to dance. It was a barbaric dance, savage and primeval, rapid, with quick movements of the hands and feet and contortions of the body; it was sensual, sexual even, but sexual without passion. It was very

animal, direct, weird without mystery, natural, in short, and one might almost say childlike. At last they grew tired. They stretched themselves on the deck and slept, and all was silent. The skipper lifted himself heavily out of his chair and clambered down the companion. He went into his cabin and got out of his clothes. He climbed into his bunk and lay there. He panted a little in the heat of the night.

But next morning, when the dawn crept over the tranquil sea, the opening in the reef which had eluded them the night before was seen a little to the east of where they lay. The schooner entered the lagoon. There was not a ripple on the surface of the water. Deep down among the coral rocks you saw little coloured fish swim. When he had anchored his ship the skipper ate his breakfast and went on deck. The sun shone from an unclouded sky, but in the early morning the air was grateful and cool. It was Sunday, and there was a feeling of quietness, a silence as though nature were at rest, which gave him a peculiar sense of comfort. He sat, looking at the wooded coast, and felt lazy and well at ease. Presently a slow smile moved his lips and he threw the stump of his cigar into the water.

"I guess I'll go ashore," he said. "Get the boat out."

He climbed stiffly down the ladder and was

rowed to a little cove. The coconut trees came down to the water's edge, not in rows, but spaced out with an ordered formality. They were like a ballet of spinsters, elderly but flippant, standing in affected attitudes with the simpering graces of a bygone age. He sauntered idly through them, along a path that just could be seen winding its tortuous way, and it led him presently to a broad creek. There was a bridge across it, but a bridge constructed of single trunks of coconut trees, a dozen of them, placed end to end and supported where they met by a forked branch driven into the bed of the creek. You walked on a smooth, round surface, narrow and slippery, and there was no support for the hand. To cross such a bridge required sure feet and a stout heart. The skipper hesitated. But he saw on the other side, nestling among the trees, a white man's house; he made up his mind and, rather gingerly, began to walk. He watched his feet carefully, and where one trunk joined on to the next and there was a difference of level, he tottered a little. It was with a gasp of relief that he reached the last tree and finally set his feet on the firm ground of the other side. He had been so intent on the difficult crossing that he never noticed anyone was watching him, and it was with surprise that he heard himself spoken to.

"It takes a bit of nerve to cross these bridges when you're not used to them."

He looked up and saw a man standing in front of him. He had evidently come out of the house which the skipper had seen.

"I saw you hesitate," the man continued, with a smile on his lips, "and I was watching to see you fall in."

"Not on your life," said the captain, who had now recovered his confidence.

"I've fallen in myself before now. I remember one evening I came back from shooting and I fell in, gun and all. Now I get a boy to carry my gun for me."

He was a man no longer young, with a small beard, now somewhat grey, and a thin face. He was dressed in a singlet, without arms, and a pair of duck trousers. He wore neither shoes nor socks. He spoke English with a slight accent.

"Are you Neilson?" asked the skipper.

"I am."

"I've heard about you. I thought you lived somewheres round here."

The skipper followed his host into the little bungalow and sat down heavily in the chair which the other motioned him to take. While Neilson went out to fetch whisky and glasses he took a look round the room. It filled him with amazement. He had never seen so many books.

The shelves reached from floor to ceiling on all four walls, and they were closely packed. There was a grand piano littered with music, and a large table on which books and magazines lay in disorder. The room made him feel embarrassed. He remembered that Neilson was a queer fellow. No one knew very much about him, although he had been in the islands for so many years, but those who knew him agreed that he was queer. He was a Swede.

"You've got one big heap of books here," he said when Neilson returned.

"They do no harm," answered Neilson with a smile.

"Have you read them all?" asked the skipper.

"Most of them."

"I'm a bit of a reader myself. I have the *Saturday Evening Post* sent me regler."

Neilson poured his visitor a good stiff glass of whisky and gave him a cigar. The skipper volunteered a little information.

"I got in last night, but I couldn't find the opening, so I had to anchor outside. I never been this run before, but my people had some stuff they wanted to bring over here. Gray, d'you know him?"

"Yes, he's got a store a little way along."

"Well, there was a lot of canned stuff that

he wanted over, an' he's got some copra. They thought I might just as well come over as lie idle at Apia. I run between Apia and Pago-Pago mostly, but they've got smallpox there just now, and there's nothing stirring."

He took a drink of his whisky and lit a cigar. He was a taciturn man, but there was something in Neilson that made him nervous, and his nervousness made him talk. The Swede was looking at him with large dark eyes in which there was an expression of faint amusement.

"This is a tidy little place you've got here."

"I've done my best with it."

"You must do pretty well with your trees. They look fine. With copra at the price it is now. I had a bit of a plantation myself once, in Upolu it was, but I had to sell it."

He looked round the room again, where all those books gave him a feeling of something incomprehensible and hostile.

"I guess you must find it a bit lonesome here though," he said.

"I've got used to it. I've been here for twenty-five years."

Now the captain could think of nothing more to say, and he smoked in silence. Neilson had apparently no wish to break it. He looked at his guest with a meditative eye. He was a tall man, more than six feet high, and very stout. His face was red and blotchy, with a network

of little purple veins on the cheeks, and his features were sunk into its fatness. His eyes were bloodshot. His neck was buried in rolls of fat. But for a fringe of long curly hair, nearly white, at the back of his head, he was quite bald; and that immense, shiny surface of forehead, which might have given him a false look of intelligence, on the contrary gave him one of peculiar imbecility. He wore a blue flannel shirt, open at the neck and showing his fat chest covered with a mat of reddish hair, and a very old pair of blue serge trousers. He sat in his chair in a heavy ungainly attitude, his great belly thrust forward and his fat legs uncrossed. All elasticity had gone from his limbs. Neilson wondered idly what sort of man he had been in his youth. It was almost impossible to imagine that this creature of vast bulk had ever been a boy who ran about. The skipper finished his whisky, and Neilson pushed the bottle towards him.

"Help yourself."

The skipper leaned forward and with his great hand seized it.

"And how come you in these parts anyways?" he said.

"Oh, I came out to the islands for my health. My lungs were bad and they said I hadn't a year to live. You see they were wrong."

"I meant, how come you to settle down right here?"

"I am a sentimentalist."

"Oh!"

Neilson knew that the skipper had not an idea what he meant, and he looked at him with an ironical twinkle in his dark eyes. Perhaps just because the skipper was so gross and dull a man the whim seized him to talk further.

"You were too busy keeping your balance to notice, when you crossed the bridge, but this spot is generally considered rather pretty."

"It's a cute little house you've got here."

"Ah, that wasn't here when I first came. There was a native hut, with its beehive roof and its pillars, overshadowed by a great tree with red flowers; and the croton bushes, their leaves yellow and red and golden, made a pied fence around it. And then all about were the coconut trees, as fanciful as women, and as vain. They stood at the water's edge and spent all day looking at their reflections. I was a young man then—good Heavens, it's a quarter of a century ago—and I wanted to enjoy all the loveliness of the world in the short time allotted to me before I passed into the darkness. I thought it was the most beautiful spot I had ever seen. The first time I saw it I had a catch at my heart, and I was afraid I was going to cry. I wasn't more than twenty-five, and though I put the

best face I could on it, I didn't want to die. And somehow it seemed to me that the very beauty of this place made it easier for me to accept my fate. I felt when I came here that all my past life had fallen away, Stockholm and its university, and then Bonn: it all seemed the life of somebody else, as though now at last I had achieved the reality which our doctors of philosophy—I am one myself, you know—had discussed so much. 'A year,' I cried to myself. 'I have a year. I will spend it here and then I am content to die.'

"We are foolish and sentimental and melodramatic at twenty-five, but if we weren't perhaps we should be less wise at fifty.

"Now drink, my friend. Don't let the nonsense I talk interfere with you."

He waved his thin hand towards the bottle, and the skipper finished what remained in his glass.

"You ain't drinking nothin'," he said, reaching for the whisky.

"I am of a sober habit," smiled the Swede. "I intoxicate myself in ways which I fancy are more subtle. But perhaps that is only vanity. Anyhow, the effects are more lasting and the results less deleterious."

"They say there's a deal of cocaine taken in the States now," said the captain.

Neilson chuckled.

"But I do not see a white man often," he continued, "and for once I don't think a drop of whisky can do me any harm."

He poured himself out a little, added some soda, and took a sip.

"And presently I found out why the spot had such an unearthly loveliness. Here love had tarried for a moment like a migrant bird that happens on a ship in mid-ocean and for a little while folds its tired wings. The fragrance of a beautiful passion hovered over it like the fragrance of hawthorn in May in the meadows of my home. It seems to me that the places where men have loved or suffered keep about them always some faint aroma of something that has not wholly died. It is as though they had acquired a spiritual significance which mysteriously affects those who pass. I wish I could make myself clear." He smiled a little. "Though I cannot imagine that if I did you would understand."

He paused.

"I think this place was beautiful because here lovers had loved beautifully." And now he shrugged his shoulders. "But perhaps it is only that my æsthetic sense is gratified by the happy conjunction of young love and a suitable setting."

Even a man less thick-witted than the skipper might have been forgiven if he were bewildered

by Neilson's words. For he seemed faintly to laugh at what he said. It was as though he spoke from emotion which his intellect found ridiculous. He had said himself that he was a sentimentalist, and when sentimentality is joined with scepticism there is often the devil to pay.

He was silent for an instant and looked at the captain with eyes in which there was a sudden perplexity.

"You know, I can't help thinking that I've seen you before somewhere or other," he said.

"I couldn't say as I remember you," returned the skipper.

"I have a curious feeling as though your face were familiar to me. It's been puzzling me for some time. But I can't situate my recollection in any place or at any time."

The skipper massively shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"It's thirty years since I first come to the islands. A man can't figure on remembering all the folk he meets in a while like that."

The Swede shook his head.

"You know how one sometimes has the feeling that a place one has never been to before is strangely familiar. That's how I seem to see you." He gave a whimsical smile. "Perhaps I knew you in some past existence. Perhaps, perhaps you were the master of a galley in ancient

Rome and I was a slave at the oar. Thirty years have you been here?"

"Every bit of thirty years."

"I wonder if you knew a man called Red?"

"Red?"

"That is the only name I've ever known him by. I never knew him personally. I never even set eyes on him. And yet I seem to see him more clearly than many men, my brothers, for instance, with whom I passed my daily life for many years. He lives in my imagination with the distinctness of a Paolo Malatesta or a Romeo. But I dare say you have never read Dante or Shakespeare?"

"I can't say as I have," said the captain.

Neilson, smoking a cigar, leaned back in his chair and looked vacantly at the ring of smoke which floated in the still air. A smile played on his lips, but his eyes were grave. Then he looked at the captain. There was in his gross obesity something extraordinarily repellent. He had the plethoric self-satisfaction of the very fat. It was an outrage. It set Neilson's nerves on edge. But the contrast between the man before him and the man he had in mind was pleasant.

"It appears that Red was the most comely thing you ever saw. I've talked to quite a number of people who knew him in those days, white men, and they all agree that the first time

you saw him his beauty just took your breath away. They called him Red on account of his flaming hair. It had a natural wave and he wore it long. It must have been of that wonderful colour that the pre-Raphaelites raved over. I don't think he was vain of it, he was much too ingenuous for that, but no one could have blamed him if he had been. He was tall, six feet and an inch or two—in the native house that used to stand here was the mark of his height cut with a knife on the central trunk that supported the roof—and he was made like a Greek god, broad in the shoulders and thin in the flanks; he was like Apollo, with just that soft roundness which Praxiteles gave him, and that suave, feminine grace which has in it something troubling and mysterious. His skin was dazzling white, milky, like satin; his skin was like a woman's."

"I had kind of a white skin myself when I was a kiddie," said the skipper, with a twinkle in his bloodshot eyes.

But Neilson paid no attention to him. He was telling his story now and interruption made him impatient.

"And his face was just as beautiful as his body. He had large blue eyes, very dark, so that some say they were black, and unlike most red-haired people he had dark eyebrows and long dark lashes. His features were perfectly

regular and his mouth was like a scarlet wound. He was twenty."

On these words the Swede stopped with a certain sense of the dramatic. He took a sip of whisky.

"He was unique. There never was anyone more beautiful. There was no more reason for him than for a wonderful blossom to flower on a wild plant. He was a happy accident of nature.

"One day he landed at that cove into which you must have put this morning. He was an American sailor, and he had deserted from a man-of-war in Apia. He had induced some good-humoured native to give him a passage on a cutter that happened to be sailing from Apia to Safoto, and he had been put ashore here in a dugout. I do not know why he deserted. Perhaps life on a man-of-war with its restrictions irked him, perhaps he was in trouble, and perhaps it was the South Seas and these romantic islands that got into his bones. Every now and then they take a man strangely, and he finds himself like a fly in a spider's web. It may be that there was a softness of fibre in him, and these green hills with their soft airs, this blue sea, took the northern strength from him as Delilah took the Nazarite's. Anyhow, he wanted to hide himself, and he thought he

would be safe in this secluded nook till his ship had sailed from Samoa.

"There was a native hut at the cove and as he stood there, wondering where exactly he should turn his steps, a young girl came out and invited him to enter. He knew scarcely two words of the native tongue and she as little English. But he understood well enough what her smiles meant, and her pretty gestures, and he followed her. He sat down on a mat and she gave him slices of pineapple to eat. I can speak of Red only from hearsay, but I saw the girl three years after he first met her, and she was scarcely nineteen then. You cannot imagine how exquisite she was. She had the passionate grace of the hibiscus and the rich colour. She was rather tall, slim, with the delicate features of her race, and large eyes like pools of still water under the palm trees; her hair, black and curling, fell down her back, and she wore a wreath of scented flowers. Her hands were lovely. They were so small, so exquisitely formed, they gave your heart-strings a wrench. And in those days she laughed easily. Her smile was so delightful that it made your knees shake. Her skin was like a field of ripe corn on a summer day. Good Heavens, how can I describe her? She was too beautiful to be real.

"And these two young things, she was sixteen

and he was twenty, fell in love with one another at first sight. That is the real love, not the love that comes from sympathy, common interests, or intellectual community, but love pure and simple. That is the love that Adam felt for Eve when he awoke and found her in the garden gazing at him with dewy eyes. That is the love that draws the beasts to one another, and the gods. That is the love that makes the world a miracle. That is the love which gives life its pregnant meaning. You have never heard of the wise, cynical French duke who said that with two lovers there is always one who loves and one who lets himself be loved; it is a bitter truth to which most of us have to resign ourselves; but now and then there are two who love and two who let themselves be loved. Then one might fancy that the sun stands still as it stood when Joshua prayed to the God of Israel.

"And even now after all these years, when I think of these two, so young, so fair, so simple, and of their love, I feel a pang. It tears my heart just as my heart is torn when on certain nights I watch the full moon shining on the lagoon from an unclouded sky. There is always pain in the contemplation of perfect beauty.

"They were children. She was good and sweet and kind. I know nothing of him, and I like to think that then at all events he was in-

genuous and frank. I like to think that his soul was as comely as his body. But I dare say he had no more soul than the creatures of the woods and forests who made pipes from reeds and bathed in the mountain streams when the world was young, and you might catch sight of little fauns galloping through the glade on the back of a bearded centaur. A soul is a troublesome possession and when man developed it he lost the Garden of Eden.

"Well, when Red came to the island it had recently been visited by one of those epidemics which the white man has brought to the South Seas, and one third of the inhabitants had died. It seems that the girl had lost all her near kin and she lived now in the house of distant cousins. The household consisted of two ancient crones, bowed and wrinkled, two younger women, and a man and a boy. For a few days he stayed there. But perhaps he felt himself too near the shore, with the possibility that he might fall in with white men who would reveal his hiding-place; perhaps the lovers could not bear that the company of others should rob them for an instant of the delight of being together. One morning they set out, the pair of them, with the few things that belonged to the girl, and walked along a grassy path under the coconuts, till they came to the creek you see. They had to cross the bridge you crossed, and

the girl laughed gleefully because he was afraid. She held his hand till they came to the end of the first tree, and then his courage failed him and he had to go back. He was obliged to take off all his clothes before he could risk it, and she carried them over for him on her head. They settled down in the empty hut that stood here. Whether she had any rights over it (land tenure is a complicated business in the islands), or whether the owner had died during the epidemic, I do not know, but anyhow no one questioned them, and they took possession. Their furniture consisted of a couple of grass-mats on which they slept, a fragment of looking-glass, and a bowl or two. In this pleasant land that is enough to start housekeeping on.

"They say that happy people have no history, and certainly a happy love has none. They did nothing all day long and yet the days seemed all too short. The girl had a native name, but Red called her Sally. He picked up the easy language very quickly, and he used to lie on the mat for hours while she chattered gaily to him. He was a silent fellow, and perhaps his mind was lethargic. He smoked incessantly the cigarettes which she made him out of the native tobacco and pandanus leaf, and he watched her while with deft fingers she made grass mats. Often natives would come in and tell long stories of the old days when the island was dis-

turbed by tribal wars. Sometimes he would go fishing on the reef, and bring home a basket full of coloured fish. Sometimes at night he would go out with a lantern to catch lobster. There were plantains round the hut and Sally would roast them for their frugal meal. She knew how to make delicious messes from coconuts, and the breadfruit tree by the side of the creek gave them its fruit. On feast-days they killed a little pig and cooked it on hot stones. They bathed together in the creek; and in the evening they went down to the lagoon and paddled about in a dugout, with its great outrigger. The sea was deep blue, wine-coloured at sundown, like the sea of Homeric Greece; but in the lagoon the colour had an infinite variety, aquamarine and amethyst and emerald; and the setting sun turned it for a short moment to liquid gold. Then there was the colour of the coral, brown, white, pink, red, purple; and the shapes it took were marvellous. It was like a magic garden, and the hurrying fish were like butterflies. It strangely lacked reality. Among the coral were pools with a floor of white sand and here, where the water was dazzling clear, it was very good to bathe. Then, cool and happy, they wandered back in the gloaming over the soft grass road to the creek, walking hand in hand, and now the mynah birds filled the coconut trees with their clamour. And then the

night, with that great sky shining with gold, that seemed to stretch more widely than the skies of Europe, and the soft airs that blew gently through the open hut, the long night again was all too short. She was sixteen and he was barely twenty. The dawn crept in among the wooden pillars of the hut and looked at those lovely children sleeping in one another's arms. The sun hid behind the great tattered leaves of the plantains so that it might not disturb them, and then, with playful malice, shot a golden ray, like the outstretched paw of a Persian cat, on their faces. They opened their sleepy eyes and they smiled to welcome another day. The weeks lengthened into months, and a year passed. They seemed to love one another as—I hesitate to say passionately, for passion has in it always a shade of sadness, a touch of bitterness or anguish, but as whole-heartedly, as simply and naturally as on that first day on which, meeting, they had recognised that a god was in them.

"If you had asked them I have no doubt that they would have thought it impossible to suppose their love could ever cease. Do we not know that the essential element of love is a belief in its own eternity? And yet perhaps in Red there was already a very little seed, unknown to himself and unsuspected by the girl, which would in time have grown to weariness.

For one day one of the natives from the cove told them that some way down the coast at the anchorage was a British whaling-ship.

"'Gee,' he said, 'I wonder if I could make a trade of some nuts and plantains for a pound or two of tobacco.'

"The pandanus cigarettes that Sally made him with untiring hands were strong and pleasant enough to smoke, but they left him unsatisfied; and he yearned on a sudden for real tobacco, hard, rank, and pungent. He had not smoked a pipe for many months. His mouth watered at the thought of it. One would have thought some premonition of harm would have made Sally seek to dissuade him, but love possessed her so completely that it never occurred to her any power on earth could take him from her. They went up into the hills together and gathered a great basket of wild oranges, green, but sweet and juicy; and they picked plantains from around the hut, and coconuts from their trees, and breadfruit and mangoes; and they carried them down to the cove. They loaded the unstable canoe with them, and Red and the native boy who had brought them the news of the ship paddled along outside the reef.

"It was the last time she ever saw him.

"Next day the boy came back alone. He was all in tears. This is the story he told. When

after their long paddle they reached the ship and Red hailed it, a white man looked over the side and told them to come on board. They took the fruit they had brought with them and Red piled it up on the deck. The white man and he began to talk, and they seemed to come to some agreement. One of them went below and brought up tobacco. Red took some at once and lit a pipe. The boy imitated the zest with which he blew a great cloud of smoke from his mouth. Then they said something to him and he went into the cabin. Through the open door the boy, watching curiously, saw a bottle brought out and glasses. Red drank and smoked. They seemed to ask him something, for he shook his head and laughed. The man, the first man who had spoken to them, laughed too, and he filled Red's glass once more. They went on talking and drinking, and presently, growing tired of watching a sight that meant nothing to him, the boy curled himself up on the deck and slept. He was awakened by a kick; and, jumping to his feet, he saw that the ship was slowly sailing out of the lagoon. He caught sight of Red seated at the table, with his head resting heavily on his arms, fast asleep. He made a movement towards him, intending to wake him, but a rough hand seized his arm, and a man, with a scowl and words which he did not understand, pointed to the side. He

shouted to Red, but in a moment he was seized and flung overboard. Helpless, he swam round to his canoe which was drifting a little way off, and pushed it on to the reef. He climbed in and, sobbing all the way, paddled back to shore.

"What had happened was obvious enough. The whaler, by desertion or sickness, was short of hands, and the captain when Red came aboard had asked him to sign on; on his refusal he had made him drunk and kidnapped him.

"Sally was beside herself with grief. For three days she screamed and cried. The natives did what they could to comfort her, but she would not be comforted. She would not eat. And then, exhausted, she sank into a sullen apathy. She spent long days at the cove, watching the lagoon, in the vain hope that Red somehow or other would manage to escape. She sat on the white sand, hour after hour, with the tears running down her cheeks, and at night dragged herself wearily back across the creek to the little hut where she had been happy. The people with whom she had lived before Red came to the island wished her to return to them, but she would not; she was convinced that Red would come back, and she wanted him to find her where he had left her. Four months later she was delivered of a still-born child, and the old woman who had come to help her through her confinement remained with her in

the hut. All joy was taken from her life. If her anguish with time became less intolerable it was replaced by a settled melancholy. You would not have thought that among these people, whose emotions, though so violent, are very transient, a woman could be found capable of so enduring a passion. She never lost the profound conviction that sooner or later Red would come back. She watched for him, and every time someone crossed this slender little bridge of coconut trees she looked. It might at last be he."

Neilson stopped talking and gave a faint sigh.

"And what happened to her in the end?" asked the skipper.

Neilson smiled bitterly.

"Oh, three years afterwards she took up with another white man."

The skipper gave a fat, cynical chuckle.

"That's generally what happens to them," he said.

The Swede shot him a look of hatred. He did not know why that gross, obese man excited in him so violent a repulsion. But his thoughts wandered and he found his mind filled with memories of the past. He went back five and twenty years. It was when he first came to the island, weary of Apia, with its heavy drinking, its gambling and coarse sensuality, a sick man,

trying to resign himself to the loss of the career which had fired his imagination with ambitious thoughts. He set behind him resolutely all his hopes of making a great name for himself and strove to content himself with the few poor months of careful life which was all that he could count on. He was boarding with a half-caste trader who had a store a couple of miles along the coast at the edge of a native village; and one day, wandering aimlessly along the grassy paths of the coconut groves, he had come upon the hut in which Sally lived. The beauty of the spot had filled him with a rapture so great that it was almost painful, and then he had seen Sally. She was the loveliest creature he had ever seen, and the sadness in those dark, magnificent eyes of hers affected him strangely. The Kanakas were a handsome race, and beauty was not rare among them, but it was the beauty of shapely animals. It was empty. But those tragic eyes were dark with mystery, and you felt in them the bitter complexity of the groping, human soul. The trader told him the story and it moved him.

"Do you think he'll ever come back?" asked Neilson.

"No fear. Why, it'll be a couple of years before the ship is paid off, and by then he'll have forgotten all about her. I bet he was pretty mad when he woke up and found he'd

been shanghaied, and I shouldn't wonder but he wanted to fight somebody. But he'd got to grin and bear it, and I guess in a month he was thinking it the best thing that had ever happened to him that he got away from the island."

But Neilson could not get the story out of his head. Perhaps because he was sick and weakly, the radiant health of Red appealed to his imagination. Himself an ugly man, insignificant of appearance, he prized very highly comeliness in others. He had never been passionately in love, and certainly he had never been loved passionately. The mutual attraction of those two young things gave him a singular delight. It had the ineffable beauty of the Absolute. He went again to the little hut by the creek. He had a gift for languages and an energetic mind, accustomed to work, and he had already given much time to the study of the local tongue. Old habit was strong in him and he was gathering together material for a paper on the Samoan speech. The old crone who shared the hut with Sally invited him to come in and sit down. She gave him *kava* to drink and cigarettes to smoke. She was glad to have someone to chat with and while she talked he looked at Sally. She reminded him of the Psyche in the museum at Naples. Her features had the same clear purity of line, and though she had borne a child she had still a virginal aspect.

It was not till he had seen her two or three times that he induced her to speak. Then it was only to ask him if he had seen in Apia a man called Red. Two years had passed since his disappearance, but it was plain that she still thought of him incessantly.

It did not take Neilson long to discover that he was in love with her. It was only by an effort of will now that he prevented himself from going every day to the creek, and when he was not with Sally his thoughts were. At first, looking upon himself as a dying man, he asked only to look at her, and occasionally hear her speak, and his love gave him a wonderful happiness. He exulted in its purity. He wanted nothing from her but the opportunity to weave around her graceful person a web of beautiful fancies. But the open air, the equable temperature, the rest, the simple fare, began to have an unexpected effect on his health. His temperature did not soar at night to such alarming heights, he coughed less and began to put on weight; six months passed without his having a hæmorrhage; and on a sudden he saw the possibility that he might live. He had studied his disease carefully, and the hope dawned upon him that with great care he might arrest its course. It exhilarated him to look forward once more to the future. He made plans. It was evident that any active life was out of the

question, but he could live on the islands, and the small income he had, insufficient elsewhere, would be ample to keep him. He could grow coconuts; that would give him an occupation; and he would send for his books and a piano; but his quick mind saw that in all this he was merely trying to conceal from himself the desire which obsessed him.

He wanted Sally. He loved not only her beauty, but that dim soul which he divined behind her suffering eyes. He would intoxicate her with his passion. In the end he would make her forget. And in an ecstasy of surrender he fancied himself giving her too the happiness which he had thought never to know again, but had now so miraculously achieved.

He asked her to live with him. She refused. He had expected that and did not let it depress him, for he was sure that sooner or later she would yield. His love was irresistible. He told the old woman of his wishes, and found somewhat to his surprise that she and the neighbours, long aware of them, were strongly urging Sally to accept his offer. After all, every native was glad to keep house for a white man, and Neilson according to the standards of the island was a rich one. The trader with whom he boarded went to her and told her not to be a fool; such an opportunity would not come again, and after so long she could not still be-

lieve that Red would ever return. The girl's resistance only increased Neilson's desire, and what had been a very pure love now became an agonising passion. He was determined that nothing should stand in his way. He gave Sally no peace. At last, worn out by his persistence and the persuasions, by turns pleading and angry, of everyone around her, she consented. But the day after when, exultant, he went to see her he found that in the night she had burnt down the hut in which she and Red had lived together. The old crone ran towards him full of angry abuse of Sally, but he waved her aside; it did not matter; they would build a bungalow on the place where the hut had stood. A European house would really be more convenient if he wanted to bring out a piano and a vast number of books.

And so the little wooden house was built in which he had now lived for many years, and Sally became his wife. But after the first few weeks of rapture, during which he was satisfied with what she gave him, he had known little happiness. She had yielded to him, through weariness, but she had yielded only what she set no store on. The soul which he had dimly glimpsed escaped him. He knew that she still cared nothing for him. She still loved Red, and all the time she was waiting for his return. At a sign from him, Neilson knew that, notwith-

standing his love, his tenderness, his sympathy, his generosity, she would leave him without a moment's hesitation. She would never give a thought to his distress. Anguish seized him and he battered at that impenetrable self of hers which sullenly resisted him. His love became bitter. He tried to melt her heart with kindness, but it remained as hard as before; he feigned indifference, but she did not notice it. Sometimes he lost his temper and abused her, and then she wept silently. Sometimes he thought she was nothing but a fraud, and that soul simply an invention of his own, and that he could not get into the sanctuary of her heart because there was no sanctuary there. His love became a prison from which he longed to escape, but he had not the strength merely to open the door—that was all it needed—and walk out into the open air. It was torture and at last he became numb and hopeless. In the end the fire burnt itself out and, when he saw her eyes rest for an instant on the slender bridge, it was no longer rage that filled his heart but impatience. For many years now they had lived together bound by the ties of habit and convenience, and it was with a smile that he looked back on his old passion. She was an old woman, for the women on the islands age quickly, and if he had no love for her any more he had tolerance. She left him

alone. He was contented with his piano and his books.

His thoughts led him to a desire for words.

"When I look back now and reflect on that brief passionate love of Red and Sally, I think that perhaps they should thank the ruthless fate that separated them when their love seemed still to be at its height. They suffered, but they suffered in beauty. They were spared the real tragedy of love."

"I don't know exactly as I get you," said the skipper.

"The tragedy of love is not death or separation. How long do you think it would have been before one or other of them ceased to care? Oh, it is dreadfully bitter to look at a woman whom you have loved with all your heart and soul, so that you felt you could not bear to let her out of your sight, and realise that you would not mind if you never saw her again. The tragedy of love is indifference."

But while he was speaking a very extraordinary thing happened. Though he had been addressing the skipper he had not been talking to him, he had been putting his thoughts into words for himself, and with his eyes fixed on the man in front of him he had not seen him. But now an image presented itself to them, an image not of the man he saw, but of another man. It was as though he were looking into

one of those distorting mirrors that make you extraordinarily squat or outrageously elongate, but here exactly the opposite took place, and in the obese, ugly old man he caught the shadowy glimpse of a stripling. He gave him now a quick, searching scrutiny. Why had a haphazard stroll brought him just to this place? A sudden tremor of his heart made him slightly breathless. An absurd suspicion seized him. What had occurred to him was impossible, and yet it might be a fact.

"What is your name?" he asked abruptly.

The skipper's face puckered and he gave a cunning chuckle. He looked then malicious and horribly vulgar.

"It's such a damned long time since I heard it that I almost forget it myself. But for thirty years now in the islands they've always called me Red."

His huge form shook as he gave a low, almost silent laugh. It was obscene. Neilson shuddered. Red was hugely amused, and from his bloodshot eyes tears ran down his cheeks.

Neilson gave a gasp, for at that moment a woman came in. She was a native, a woman of somewhat commanding presence, stout without being corpulent, dark, for the natives grow darker with age, with very grey hair. She wore a black Mother Hubbard, and its thinness

showed her heavy breasts. The moment had come.

She made an observation to Neilson about some household matter and he answered. He wondered if his voice sounded as unnatural to her as it did to himself. She gave the man who was sitting in the chair by the window an indifferent glance, and went out of the room. The moment had come and gone.

Neilson for a moment could not speak. He was strangely shaken. Then he said:

"I'd be very glad if you'd stay and have a bit of dinner with me. Pot luck."

"I don't think I will," said Red. "I must go after this fellow Gray. I'll give him his stuff and then I'll get away. I want to be back in Apia tomorrow."

"I'll send a boy along with you to show you the way."

"That'll be fine."

Red heaved himself out of his chair, while the Swede called one of the boys who worked on the plantation. He told him where the skipper wanted to go, and the boy stepped along the bridge. Red prepared to follow him.

"Don't fall in," said Neilson.

"Not on your life."

Neilson watched him make his way across and when he had disappeared among the coconuts he looked still. Then he sank heavily in

his chair. Was that the man who had prevented him from being happy? Was that the man whom Sally had loved all these years and for whom she had waited so desperately? It was grotesque. A sudden fury seized him so that he had an instinct to spring up and smash everything around him. He had been cheated. They had seen each other at last and had not known it. He began to laugh, mirthlessly, and his laughter grew till it became hysterical. The gods had played him a cruel trick. And he was old now.

At last Sally came in to tell him dinner was ready. He sat down in front of her and tried to eat. He wondered what she would say if he told her now that the fat old man sitting in the chair was the lover whom she remembered still with the passionate abandonment of her youth. Years ago, when he hated her because she made him so unhappy, he would have been glad to tell her. He wanted to hurt her then as she hurt him, because his hatred was only love. But now he did not care. He shrugged his shoulders listlessly.

"What did that man want?" she asked presently.

He did not answer at once. She was old too, a fat old native woman. He wondered why he had ever loved her so madly. He had laid at her feet all the treasures of his soul, and she

had cared nothing for them. Waste, what waste! And now, when he looked at her, he felt only contempt. His patience was at last exhausted. He answered her question.

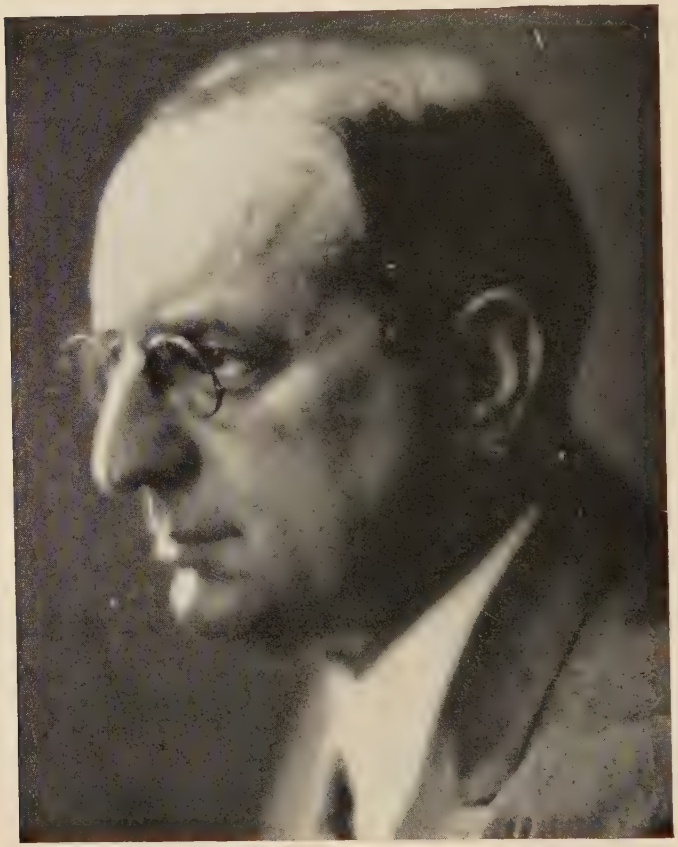
"He's the captain of a schooner. He's come from Apia."

"Yes."

"He brought me news from home. My eldest brother is very ill and I must go back."

"Will you be gone long?"

He shrugged his shoulders.



CAMPBELL

MONTAGUE GLASS

FOREWORD

IT is extremely difficult for a writer to estimate the quality of his own work. He is almost certain to be confronted with the criticism that, if that is what is considered to be his best short story, Heaven help the rest of them. However, I fall back upon the anecdote of the old Scots schoolmaster who was the judge of a beauty contest in his village and he surprised the community by awarding the prize to his elderly ugly daughter.

"Mon!" said a neighbor, "there's half a hundred lassies in the village that's better-looking than your daughter."

"You're putting it small. There's at least a hundred," he said, "but," he added, "a mon must favor his own."

Therefore, I nominate as my favorite short story, written by me, Well, Why Not? I have a great many favorite short stories written by others, but as I understand the conditions under which this volume is published, each writer is limited to his own work. I read my own work, not for amusement but only to correct the errors made by the stenographer before it is mailed to the publisher. In these circumstances, my favorite short story of my own writing would be the one most accurately transcribed by the stenographer. My really favorite short stories—the ones I read for amusement—are written by all sorts of writers, notably Ring Lardner. However, the publisher in this instance demands that a man must favor his own. Well,

Why Not? was transcribed without error by a stenographic bureau, the name of which I unfortunately forget. Well, Why Not? is therefore my favorite short story.

WELL, WHY NOT?

By Montague Glass

THE fact is that you've got old-fashioned ideas, Spirinova," said the impresario Spirinoff to his wife Madame Spirinova, the distinguished ex-prima donna of the Harkow opera. "You still consider that with a beautiful face and a fine figure, you understand, a singer should ought to have a voice. This is a big mistake and could cost us already money."

"Sdetzo!" Spirinova exclaimed, and her lip would have curled contemptuously except that several years before, when the beauty parlour business was as much in its infancy as motion pictures are today, she had been unsuccessfully treated by the electric needle for a black mustache. Hence her lip could no longer curl even though her mustache could. However, she possessed large, black, and expressive eyes, and with these she contrived to wither her husband

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with one indignant glare. "What *you* know about singing!" she said.

Spirinoff shrugged his shoulders. "And also you told *doch* the father that in six months I could make her fit to give already an appearance at the Metropolitan," she continued.

"Well, what would I tell him?" Spirinoff protested. "Ain't he got a big garment business, and believe me, Spirinova, there's singers at the Metropolitan which sound like they was trained by much worser teachers than you."

"Sdetzo!" Spirinova exclaimed again. "Well, if I am such a rotten teacher, Spirinoff, maybe you would like to pay from your own pocket we should hire it one of them fakers from uptown he should give the girl lessons. Send her also candy and flowers, Spirinoff, and take her by high-priced restaurants to lunch also. What do I care?"

Spirinoff raised his right hand in the gesture of a toastmaster requesting silence for the speaker of the evening. He failed to obtain it, however, and it was not until Madame Spirinova had recited what might have been a new and unexpurgated edition of "The Affairs of Anatol" with just a suggestion of Casanova, that the hero of her absorbing narrative could obtain a hearing.

"Spirinova, listen to me," he said earnestly. "My interest in the daughter of this here

Mr. Gollub the garment manufacturer is strictly business."

"Sdetzo!" Spirinova cried again.

"Yes, that is so," he assured her, "and I'll tell you right now, Spirinova, if you are going to say *is that so* every time I am trying to give you an advice which would put us on easy street for anyhow a year or two, y'understand, there's a lot of managers like Behrensohn and Gitlitz which would run away with this here proposition."

"Sdetzo!" Spirinova exclaimed finally. "Well, the trouble with you is you are a visionary, Spirinoff. You see the girl's father paying two thousand dollars for an appearance at Carnegie Hall or something. These are high ideals which you've got it, Spirinoff. They are too high by fifteen hundred dollars. He told me himself he is willing to go five hundred dollars that the girl should become a finished artist and not a cent more. Also he expects that with five hundred dollars a musical education, right away she should get an engagement to sing by anyhow three hundred and fifty dollars a week. He says he figures that for fifty dollars she could learn it stenography and make a minimum of thirty-five dollars a week, and for ten times that much education she should ought to draw down ten times so much wages. This here Gollub, he ain't an

artist like you and me. He is a business man, a shopkeeper. All he thinks of is money—money. What does he care about art?"

Spirinova drew the folds of what had once been a bright-coloured kimono around her.

"Three hundred and fifty a week," she repeated, "and for this I should charge only five hundred dollars. Money! That is the whole thing in America!"

She sat down heavily and rested her forehead on her clenched fist in a posture appropriate to the third act of *"Pique-Dame"* by Tschaikovsky, from which she was aroused by the entrance of Lou Spear, for his age—nineteen going on twenty—one of the best eccentric dancers in small-time vaudeville.

"Howdy, folks," he said, and then observing that his mother was plunged in heavy third-act gloom, he raised his eyebrows at his father and nodded sideways in the direction of his mother. "What's biting her?" he asked, and Madame Spirinova's head began to nod slowly.

"America!" she exclaimed. "That's a country! Respect for parents, there is none. Earnestness, art, study, what *is* it?" She brought her hands together in a gesture of despair, and then pressed them both to where an operatic convention has localized the human heart, at the point where the descending colon leaves the transverse colon. " 'What's biting me?' says

my only son, and the father stands by yet!" she exclaimed bitterly.

"Well, what *is* biting you?" Lou Spear insisted.

"The boy's got right, Spirinova," Spirinoff said. "You're making a big fuss over nothing. Anybody coming in here right now would think the way you look that we've just got a dispossess or something."

"Well, if that's what's eating her," Lou Spear interrupted, "she can make her mind easy. I'm to sign up today with Al Zinberg for a hundred and fifty per."

"A hundred and fifty per!" Spirinova shrieked. "And this is my reward that from ten years old I got him lessons from Lebedeff what taught already Pavlowa, and from Rezwetzoff which he give Mordkin all *he* knew. A hundred and fifty per! *Vsyo otnyal oo minya!*"

"Whatever that may mean!" Lou added. "And whatever it does mean, a hundred and fifty per ain't to be sneezed at."

"Ach!" Spirinoff cried, flipping his right hand at his son. "Don't pay no attention to her, Louis. Everybody should have such a misfortune that their son makes a hundred and fifty dollars a week at nineteen."

"For a single it ain't bad," Lou admitted, modestly, "and Al Zinberg says if I could find

someone as snappy and good-looking as me to team up with, he could get four hundred like that."

That was expressed by snapping his fingers lightly, but Spirinova snapped her fingers with the greater force of a long experience in the rôle of Carmen.

"You should ought to get six hundred, seven hundred," cried the champion of art in its struggle with money. "My old confrère Bielawsky has got his boy Gregor by a musical show which opens next week, seven hundred and fifty per with a dancing partner which I give you my word, Spirinoff, if they would understand in this country what the art of dancing really is, y'understand, she couldn't be not even a figurante or coryphée."

"You mean Biel and Moran?" Lou asked, and Spirinova nodded. "Well, let me tell you something, mommer," he continued. "I don't know what them two things is she couldn't be, but she could be my dancing partner tomorrow and I could draw down a thousand per for the double with any show, because with her face and shape she could fall over her feet every ten seconds and still get notices above Will Rogers."

"That's what I am telling your mother," Spirinoff said. "Last night there comes here a Mr. Max Gollub and his daughter which he

wants her she should be a singer. In fifteen minutes they would come back for mommer's decision is she going to train her!"

"Will I train a voice so big that it wouldn't fill already a telephone booth?" Spirinova demanded.

"Let it *not* fill a telephone booth," Spirinoff retorted. "With her face and shape she couldn't sing above a whisper, and the audience would think they'd been listening to Schumann-Heink or anyhow Galli-Curci."

"Before your own son you ain't ashamed to say this," Spirinova cried, her jealousy flaming up anew.

Lou whistled significantly. "So *that's* it, is it?" he said.

"Louis!" Spirinova cried. "You've got business to attend to by your contract, ain't it? I must get dressed if I am to see this here Gollub and his daughter."

"I don't sign no contracts till this afternoon," Lou said, taking off his overcoat, "so I guess I'll look 'em over, too."

Spirinova raised both her arms in the traditional grand-opera appeal to high heaven.

"The apples don't fall far from the tree," she said, and swept angrily from the room.

"This young girl must be a humdinger," Lou remarked after his mother had slammed her bedroom door behind her.

Spirinoff lighted a cigarette. "It ain't proper I should discuss such things with you Louis," he said, "but she is peaches and cream, Louis, and if I could make a contract with her like Gitlitz and Behrensohn has made with one or two singers I could tell you about, I would get a commission on her salary for life, Louis. And it won't be a small salary, neither."

"But if she ain't got no voice——" Louis began.

Spirinoff waved the index-finger of his right hand. "That's what your mommer says," he interrupted, "but she's got a voice, all right. It's a small voice and it needs training; that's all." He puffed seriously at his cigarette. "Also she's got stage presence and temperament, too, but your mommer can't see it," he concluded. "She's crazy with jealousy."

"She *is* crazy," the nineteen-year-old Louis declared, "to be jealous of you at your age."

Spirinoff nodded. "I'm an old man, Louis," he said bitterly. "I'm pretty near forty-three."

As a matter of fact, Louis thought his father was only forty-one, and it came to him as quite a shock that he must cherish the old folks while he still had them with him. He therefore proffered Spirinoff the cigar which Al Zinberg had handed out to bind the contract he had verbally made with Louis, and supple-

mented this gift by patting his old or at least rapidly aging father on the shoulder.

"No one would guess it on you at that," he said encouragingly.

The elder Spirinoff murmured his thanks. "You're a big comfort to your mommer and me in our old age, Louis," he said, "in particular your mommer, which she will be forty-two next Monday, Louis, and if this here Miss Gollub has got only half her pep and ambition, y'understand, she would be already a sensation."

Here Spirinoff heaved a profound sigh.

"If only your mommer was a little more *simpatica,* Louis!" he said. "What couldn't she have been in Riga if she hadn't thrown the piano *partitur* of *'Forza del Destino'* at the *régisseur?* It was the same way in Nijni. 'Spirinova,' I says, ' you are going too far,' I says. 'You cannot call a *maestro d'orchestra* a dirty dog,' I says, ' not in the middle of a performance, anyhow,' and the results was they didn't renew her contract."

What further details of Spirinova's career he could have disclosed were interrupted by a ring at the door-bell.

"Here they are now, Louis," he said, rising wearily, but when a moment later he opened the door leading into the hallway of the sixth floor in the Second Avenue apartment building in which the Spirinoff family housed its artistic

pursuits, including its cuisine and laundry work, there stood revealed not the fascinating Miss Gollub and her father, but a figure much less decorative than either. It was that of Sergei Bielawsky, formerly basso profundo of the Harkow Opera, later proprietor of the defunct Bielawsky Conservatory of Music on East Fourth Street and finally the occupant of the table nearest the stove in the Café de la Paix, corner of Twelfth Street and Second Avenue.

"Strasvouitie! Strasvouitie!" he cried in a voice whose resonance had at one time cracked the filaments in the electric light bulbs of the Harkow Opera. It had been in no wise impaired by American cigarettes and it had even been intensified by a long indulgence in post-war whisky, fumes of which blended with the odour of fried onions—always the harbinger of meal-time in a Second Avenue apartment house.

"Bielawsky," Spirinoff said, "we are busy and you must excuse us this morning."

It was a warm day in April. Nevertheless, Bielawsky was wrapped in a fur-lined overcoat, buttoned to the neck, and his gray and matted hair brushed the top of his astrakhan collar, which in twenty years had in fact known no other brush and looked it.

"One moment!" he said. "Only one moment I'll detain you."

He edged past Spirinoff and entered the large living-room where Louis stood to greet the feminine object of his mother's jealousy. That he was disappointed would go without saying, but Louis said it notwithstanding.

"What's *he* butting in for?" he exclaimed.

"Louis," Bielawsky said, "you're in luck that I find you here."

"In rotten luck," Louis added. "Which if you want to make a touch, Mr. Bielawsky, why don't you go to your boy George?"

Bielawsky drew himself up so indignantly that the button flew off the neck of his fur overcoat and revealed the absence of a necktie underneath.

"Spirinoff," he said, "if your son has no respect for you, let him have respect at least for your friends."

Spirinoff shrugged. "If you've got something to say to the boy, go ahead."

"I've got nothing to say to him," Bielawsky announced with dignity. "I would never lower myself I should speak to him at all, but Gregor says if he wants a job to support him and Miss Moran by their new show 'Be Careful, Girly,' he would give him seventy-five a week and eighty-five on the road."

Louis broke into a mirthless and to Bielawsky a most offensive laugh.

"The word *support* you can't stand, I sup-

pose," he said to Louis, "but believe me, Spirinoff, your boy could support worser dancers than Gregor, and as for Miss Moran——" He broke off suddenly and kissed the tips of his fingers with a loud smack.

"Moran's all right," Louis said. "Moran don't have to move a toe. She's there without it, but why a nice girl like that should team up with your George, that's beyond me."

"Why not?" Bielawsky demanded.

"Because he's no good, see?" Louis cried. "And so are you."

"Louis! Louis!" Spirinoff protested.

Louis jerked his thumb toward the door. "Go on!" he said. "Get out of here!" He turned his back on Bielawsky and sat down just as Spirinova entered.

"Louis!" she exclaimed. "How dare you talk this way?" She turned to Bielawsky and held out her right hand in a well-schooled gesture of compassion. "My poor friend!" she almost sang. "From my heart, I apologize." She was expanding her lungs so as not to interrupt a long speech with pauses for air when the door-bell rang and this time Louis was not disappointed.

"Come right in, Mr. Gollub *and* Miss Gollub," Spirinoff cried as he opened the door.

He led the way into the living-room, closely followed by Mr. Gollub, a short, slight person

with a close-clipped mustache, who possessed all the outward appearance of forcefulness which characterizes an A to K bookkeeper in a small commercial bank, combined with bow legs. What really impressed people who were acquainted with Mr. Gollub and his family, however, was the complete omission from Mr. Gollub's personality of any clue by which one could deduce the existence of an only daughter with the perfection of form and feature of Miss Goldie Gollub.

At forty-one years of age, Madame Spirinova's eyes were of a size and brilliancy to be envied by a Spanish dancer and *copleta* singer, whose eyes are so much more important to her career than her legs or her voice. Compared to Miss Gollub's eyes, however, Spirinova's were as two-penny tallow dips to the large chandelier in the Paris Opera. And these eyes of Miss Gollub were set in a face so beautiful that even Bielawsky felt the influence of it. To conceal the absence of collar and necktie, he held his fur coat tight round his neck with his trembling right hand while his left felt unconsciously for the monocle that at one time dangled at his waist; but monocle and waist had both disappeared years ago.

"She is like your wife twenty years ago," he

murmured in Russian to Spirinoff, but the impresario was too busy to pay any attention to him.

"You have an audience today, Miss Gollub," he said, nodding toward Louis—"my son Louis."

Now when Louis had told his parents that he could command a higher salary by teaming up with a dancing partner as snappy and good-looking as himself, he might have been immodest, but he was not untruthful. In fact, had Miss Gollub been consulted about it, after Louis had acknowledged the introduction with his best audience bow, she would have declared that Louis had understated the matter. At any rate, she blushed vividly, and when the tide of admiring colour had retreated, her cheeks so vividly contrasted with the pure whiteness of her neck and forehead that Madame Spirinova was compelled to nudge her husband from a rapt contemplation of Miss Gollub into professional activity.

"Spirinoff," she said, "what are you standing? Get from the music cabinet *'Deh Vieni, Non Tardar.'* "

A frightened look came into Miss Gollub's brown eyes. "I can't sing that in front of all these people," she protested.

"You sang it very nice yesterday," Spirinoff assured her.

"And as you sang yesterday, so you will sing again today," Spirinova said with an equivocal smile. "And this gentleman here will listen to you."

Here Mr. Gollub for the first time asserted himself. "Where does he come in?" he inquired. "I thought this morning we would fix up the terms and so forth, Mr. and Mrs. Spirinoff and myself together without family or friends—ain't it?"

Spirinova swept back her wavy hair with a heavily but not expensively jewelled hand. "It don't go so quick, Mr. Gollub," she said. "I want this gentleman he should also express an opinion on your daughter's voice. He's an expert."

Bielawsky, still clutching his coat, bowed impressively.

"One expert at a time, Mrs. Spirinoff," Gollub said. "I am hiring you as an expert, ain't I, Mrs. Spirinoff?"

Bielawsky cleared his throat, but without materially decreasing the rasping quality of his voice. "Madame Spirinova and I have been for years fellow artists," he explained. "As her friend, I give my services for nothing. You are welcome to my opinion of your daughter's voice."

Gollub nodded. "I'm satisfied," he said; "only one thing I must got to tell you. This

thing has got to be settled right here and now. I've wasted enough time away from the store, Mrs. Spirinoff."

Spirinova winced at this repeated Americanization of her surname, but she smiled amiably at Mr. Gollub nevertheless.

"It will be settled quickly now," she declared, and seating herself at the ancient concert grand piano which filled a good quarter of the room, she played in perfunctory fashion the opening measures of the Mozart aria.

Miss Gollub stood with her arm outstretched on the side of the piano, and with her beautiful head bent as though collecting herself for a splendid piece of artistry. At the end of the brief piano introduction, she lifted her face, flushed and animated, and as her lips parted, she exposed a perfect set of teeth.

If, Bielawsky reflected, she produced a tone one-tenth as grateful to the ear as the picture she presented was to the eye, nothing could prevent the eclipse of Jeritza. With an encouraging nod, however, Spirinova signalled Miss Gollub to begin singing, and at the first note Jeritza was safe. Moreover, in the present state of Miss Gollub's vocal development, not only was Jeritza safe, but the lowliest chorus lady of the Metropolitan ensemble had nothing to fear from Miss Gollub's competition either.

Indeed, as the aria proceeded, such was the

effect of Miss Gollub's crude singing on Bielawsky that he released his grasp on the neck of his overcoat and shamelessly revealed his soiled and collarless shirt.

"Well, you can't have everything," he said at the conclusion of the song, "so I will say good morning to you, Mr. Gollub." He rose to his feet and started from the room.

"Wait a minute," Louis cried. "You ain't said what you think of this lady's voice."

"What voice?" he said. "Was there a voice around here? If there was, I didn't hear it."

Miss Gollub's eyes filled with tears and she clasped her hands miserably.

"Is that so!" Louis exclaimed. "Well, I think she sings swell."

Bielawsky laughed a hoarse, insulting guffaw. "You think!" he jeered. "Since when was your son a critic of singing, Spirinova?"

"Ask me, not her," Louis said. "I've been listening to more kinds of singing in the past fifteen years than this here Gatti-Casazza. Singing and scrapping goes on in this house in day and night shifts, Bielawsky, and the only idea of singing everybody's got around here is that it should sound like hollering in an empty barrel. That's what all you foreigners think."

"Foreigners!" Spirinoff and Spirinova exclaimed with more accord than was usual in their marital conversation.

"Foreigners!" Louis repeated. "That's what I said. When it comes to singing, calling each other by your right names, wearing collars and neckties and living like human beings, you folks ain't begun to emigrate yet. You're still in the old country."

Bielawsky turned to Louis's mother. "Ain't you got no control over your own son, Spirinova?" he asked.

"Say, listen," Louis broke in. "This lady's name is Mrs. Spirinoff, and you've got to call her by it when I'm around."

Mr. Gollub began to perspire with timidity and signalized his impending departure by slapping his derby hat on his head with a loud tambourine-like noise.

"*Nu,* Goldie," he said to his daughter, "I guess we'll be going."

"What for?" Louis demanded. "You ain't even begun to talk terms yet."

"Terms!" Gollub murmured. "What terms? Do you suppose for one minute I would pay even two cents to someone for teaching my daughter singing when this here expert says she ain't got no voice?"

Louis snatched Mr. Gollub's hat from his head and threw it on the piano. "Do you expect your daughter to have a foreign voice or an American voice?" he asked.

Mr. Gollub shrugged. "A voice is a voice,"

he said, "whether it's domestic or imported."

"That's where you make a big mistake," Louis retorted, seating himself at the piano. "Now, come, Miss Gollub, this here Mozart died a couple of hundred years ago. Get onto a live one, like this." He began to play the song hit of a recent Broadway success.

"Louis!" Spirinova cried. "Please! Not in this house!"

"Why not?" Louis asked. "Miss Gollub don't object. I'll bet she sings it, too."

Miss Gollub nodded.

"Then go ahead, and show 'em what you can do," Louis said. "Shoot!"

The next moment Miss Gollub had worked a remarkable transformation in the appearance and manner of everybody in that room. Once more Bielawsky clutched the collar of his coat and fumbled for the monocle that was no longer there.

Spirinoff, who up to then had been quite crushed, straightened himself in his chair and smiled happily. Even Spirinova forgot to be the tragedy queen and looked interested, for as an artist she could appreciate any manifestation of the vocal art, and within its narrow limits Miss Gollub's interpretation of a trite Broadway song hit was a most artistic performance.

She sang two of the three stanzas with the refrain, her eyes sparkling and her body sway-

ing to the seductive rhythm of the accompaniment, but before playing the introduction to the remaining stanza, Louis paused.

"There's a dance goes at the end of this last verse," he said. "Do you think you could make it in that space there?" He indicated the rug on which Miss Gollub stood.

"You didn't say you could dance, did you, Miss Gollub?" Spirinoff asked.

"She don't have to say it," Louis broke in. "I know she can dance. Ain't that right, Miss Gollub?"

Again Goldie nodded, and flashed so brilliant a smile at Louis that he played the first measures of the accompaniment in the wrong key and had to begin all over again.

"The dance'll be a repeat of the whole number," he announced, and two minutes later, when Miss Gollub sank flushed and breathless onto the sofa, he turned triumphantly to Bielawsky.

"Why don't you offer *her* seventy-five a week to support Biel and Moran?" he said.

"I've got nothing to say against this lady's dancing," Bielawsky replied. "She dances A-number-one."

"And she's got a light soprano of a good range also," Spirinoff declared.

"For operetta," Spirinova added firmly, "not for grand opera."

"Absolutely not," Bielawsky agreed. "And what's more, Spirinoff, this is such a voice which she's got it, that if you train a voice like this, y'understand, you are liable to train away what little voice she has got."

Once more Mr. Gollub violently assumed his derby hat and produced a ringing sound which seemed to punctuate the negotiations with a large black period.

"Then that settles it," he said. "Come on, Goldie."

But Goldie remained seated on the sofa, where, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears. Immediately Louis rose from the piano-stool and sat down beside her.

"Miss Gollub," he pleaded, "for heaven's sakes, don't do that." He turned to his father. "Pop!" he cried. "Can't you do nothing?"

"Do!" Spirinoff murmured, shrugging his shoulders. "What can I do? The girl would make a very snappy Musetta. She could sing already such rôles like Amina, even if she did have to take any note above A with her eyebrows. It's been done before in grand opera, and it will be done again. All she needs is training, and if she couldn't make her twenty, thirty thousand a year, then I'm crazy."

"You *are* crazy," Spirinova declared, just as Gollub was about to remove his hat. "Let the girl dance. That's her *métier.*"

Bielawsky nodded emphatically, and had Miss Gollub not at that precise moment indulged in another and more violent attack of weeping it is impossible to say what would have been the consequences in view of the unprotected condition of Bielawsky's collarless throat. Both Lou and his father would probably have strangled him, but instead they applied themselves to the more agreeable task of comforting Miss Gollub, each patting a shoulder while Spirinova trembled with suppressed rage and jealousy.

"S'enough, Spirinoff," she said hoarsely. "Let's make an end here."

She turned to Gollub and motioned him to be seated with a gesture which usually accompanied the line *"Reste la,* Don José." Gollub promptly removed his hat and sat down.

"You have heard what my husband said," she began.

"And you said it was crazy," Bielawsky broke in.

"With some teachers, yes. It *is* crazy," Spirinova admitted, "but with the operatic training which I could give her, it is not impossible that she should make her twenty thousand a year."

"And I should pay good money for near-impossibilities," Gollub said. "Is this the idea?"

Here Miss Gollub herself created a diversion by jumping excitedly to her feet. It was her first contribution to the argument and it was a notable one.

"What am I?" she demanded. "A dummy? You're treating me like I couldn't hear or something. Do you suppose for one moment that I'd take lessons from this lady now? Not if she could make a Melba out of me at fifty cents an hour. Come on, pop."

Bielawsky laid a detaining and extremely dirty hand on her arm. "If," he began, "there is anything I have said——"

"*You've* said!" she cried. "Do you think I care what you say or anybody else around here —except maybe this boy!" She grasped Lou's shoulder and pressed it affectionately. "And the chances are, he's mistaken, too," she said. "I probably am pretty bad, at that."

She started for the door with Mr. Gollub following, but Lou once more grabbed the musical derby hat and this time he held it behind him.

"Now you ain't going to leave here like this," he announced. "You're going to have your lessons, if not from her, from somebody else."

"Sdetzo!" Spirinova and Mr. Gollub exclaimed in perfect unison.

"And who is going to pay for these lessons?" Mr. Gollub continued.

Louis cleared his throat and glanced at his father. "I will," he said huskily.

"You will!" Spirinoff said. "From what?"

"I've got in savings-bank right now twelve hundred and forty-two dollars," Lou said. "I didn't turn over all my money to you folks, not by a jugful."

Spirinova's head again became palsied with indignation. "This is the reward I get!" she exclaimed. "I suppose also your contract with this here Al Zinberg calls for two hundred and fifty, not one hundred and fifty."

"That's my business," Louis said.

"Is it?" Spirinova retorted. "Well, let me tell you it's a law that a mother and father is entitled to the earnings of their children."

Louis waved both his hands at his mother. "That idea belongs with calling you Spirinova and wearing a fur coat and no necktie," he said. "That's a law which didn't get by Ellis Island, mommer, so get this straight. My earnings is my own and I invest them as I please, and if I want to stake this lady to a thousand dollars so as she can have her voice trained, the law is by the Second Avenue Municipal Court and everywhere this side of the Battery that I've got a right to do it."

Gollub snatched his hat from Louis's grasp.

"And do you suppose I'd let you pay for my daughter's lessons?" he asked.

"Why not?" Louis said.

"Why not!" Gollub exclaimed. "What *are* you? Her husband or something?"

Louis's face grew instantly scarlet, but Goldie was not at all embarrassed. Indeed, she grasped Louis's moist and trembling hand and squeezed it hard.

"It's all right," she said. "I'll get the lessons somehow."

For an instant longer she retained Louis's hand, and then with a last dazzling smile, she followed her father from the apartment.

Spirinoff, who was lounging in a chair, turned wearily to the late basso profundo of the Harkow Opera.

"Bielawsky," he said, almost gently, "my boy is right. The time is past for Russian compliments and Russian foolishness. Therefore I speak to you in plain Second Avenue English. Do me the favour! Get the hell out of here and don't come back."

Spirinova rose to at least four inches above her normal height and drew a long breath, but her husband forestalled her.

"Koosh!" he bellowed. "I heard enough from you, Mrs. Spirinoff. For three dollars a family circle seat, and I can have grand opera four nights a week by the Metropolitan Opera

House. But this is my home and the home of my boy here. Go out in the kitchen and get for us some lunch." He pointed to the door. "*Nu,* Bielawsky," he said, "will you get out or shall I kick you out?"

Bielawsky looked at Spirinova, but in the two large tears which began to furrow their way down the make-up on her cheeks he found little encouragement to stay, and the next moment the hall door closed behind him.

"T'phooee!" Spirinoff exclaimed, throwing up the windows. "The place smells like a distillery already." He sat down by the side of his son and placed his arm around the boy's shoulder. "Cheer up, Louis," he said. "After all, it ain't you which has lost the chance of a lifetime."

He lighted a cigarette and puffed reflectively while Spirinova, twisting her handkerchief between her hands, watched them.

"So you've got in savings-bank twelve hundred dollars, Louis," he continued.

Louis nodded gloomily. "Twelve hundred and forty-two dollars without the last interest," he said.

Spirinoff again patted his shoulder. "I wonder would you lend it me for a year," he asked the boy.

Madame Spirinova fairly leaped to her feet.

"Louis!" she screamed. "Don't do no such thing. He'll gamble with it."

"You're right," Spirinoff assured her. "That's just what I'm going to do. And I'm going to win. I'm going to see that *Italiener* feller, the one who trained the mezzo Gianarelli which Behrensohn and Gitlitz now draw regularly a commission of anyhow three hundred a week from her concert engagements alone. And I'm going to play in that whole twelve hundred and fifty dollars on this Miss Gollub. She's a bet, Louis, a big bet."

"And you would go to this here *Italiener* and not give me the chance," Spirinova wailed.

Spirinoff smiled sadly. "You had your chance and you threw it away," he declared. "You've got this Miss Gollub all wrong. You think she's just a pretty girl and that Louis and me see nothing else in her, but you're mistaken. We see in her all sorts of things, and one of them is that she's got just so much high spirits like you've got it." He grabbed her hand and patted it gently. "Why, if you was to give that girl lessons, mommer," he said, using that endearing term for the first time in years, "we would got to separate you with policemen yet, and besides she wouldn't learn by you, anyway. She just now said so. So come on, Louis, and we will get our lunch on the way up-town."

This time Madame Spirinova clutched at her

real heart, not her operatic one. "Up-town!" she exclaimed. "Then you *are* going to see this *Italiener?*" Spirinoff nodded. "All right," she said. "I'll go with you."

Here Louis intervened. "You won't do nothing of the kind," he declared. "You've got to know it sooner or later, mommer, but this is a business matter which concerns me, and hereafter you've got to keep strictly out of my affairs."

Harsh as this ultimatum appeared to be, however, it was not nearly as shocking as the behaviour of George Biel alias Gregor Bielawsky towards his father Sergei when the latter arrived at the table nearest the stove in the Café de la Paix at the corner of Second Avenue and Twelfth Street.

"For the love of Mike, where've you been keeping yourself?" George demanded. "I've been waiting for you for half an hour."

"Ach!" Bielawsky exclaimed, flipping the fingers of his right hand. "The girl ain't got no voice at all."

"What girl ain't got no voice?" George demanded. "Are you a *bissel meshuggeh* or something? I sent you over to find out if Louis would accept seventy-five a week to join the act, and you begin to talk about somebody not having a voice."

"Gregor!" Bielawsky cried. "What comes

over you this morning? You got pepper up your nose something terrible."

"Well, why don't you tell me what Louis said?" George retorted. "If I don't get Louis, I can't open."

"Why not?" Bielawsky asked.

"Because I've got to break in a new girl," George said gloomily as he drummed the table top with his fingers. "Moran quit on me yesterday and I've got to have Louis to steady the act with a new girl in it, or I can't open."

"Then why didn't you tell me this before I went over there?" Bielawsky said. "Because Louis ain't available no longer. He's got a contract with Zinberg, and I don't even know the girl's address, even if I could remember her father's name."

"Listen!" George inquired. "Have you been drinking again?"

"Did I ever stop?" Bielawsky retorted. "And what has drinking got to do with it? The girl ain't got no voice, I admit, but as a dancer, Gregor, she's there, Gregor, and as a looker——" Bielawsky kissed the tips of his fingers with such a moisture of admiration that compared with the rest of his hand, they seemed quite clean. "Believe me, Gregor," he concluded, "you will never miss Moran when you see this girl once."

"When I see this girl once!" George ex-

claimed, "and you don't know her address even if you could remember her name."

"But Spirinova could tell us, Gregor," Bielawsky said, grabbing his son's arm. "Let's go right over and ask her."

No sooner had they reached the sidewalk than Spirinova herself approached from the street corner. "Good morning, Mrs. Spirinoff," George Biel cried jovially, but Spirinova assumed an expression of such frigid haughtiness that Bielawsky shivered in his fur coat. Moreover, she answered in Russian, a tongue imperfectly understood by George Biel.

"My name," she said, "is Madame Spirinova. I know nobody called Mrs. Spirinoff."

"Certainly it's a nice day if that's what you said," George assured her. "But if you'll come inside for a moment, I want to talk business to you."

The effect on Spirinova was electrical. "Business!" she shrieked. "Always business! That is the trouble here! All is business, business, business, and where is it the art, the beauty?"

Bielawsky tried to calm her. "Not in the street, Spirinova," he pleaded.

Gently he thrust her through the doorway of the café and a moment later they sat at what ought to have been Bielawsky's voting address, the table nearest the stove.

"Bring this lady a cup coffee and some *mohn küchen,*" he said to the waiter, and then he took Spirinova's jewelled fingers and affectionately patted the vitreous ornaments which covered them. "You have much to distress you this morning, Spirinova," he said in Russian, but Spirinova chose for her answer the vernacular of the neighborhood.

"You bet my life I have," she said. "What the devil you are coming round to my house for at eleven o'clock in the morning, I don't know! You are at the bottom of everything. *You will train the voice away,* he says. *You dassen't touch such a voice,* he says, and this here *Italiener* steps in and *he* trains the girl's voice, not me."

"But who gives a button about the girl's voice?" George Biel interrupted. "Forget voices for a minute and listen to me. I've got to get ahold of that girl before two o'clock this afternoon, and I want her name and address."

Madame Spirinova grew at once strangely calm, not to say suspicious. "What for?" she asked.

"What's the difference, what for?" Bielawsky began, but his son brushed him aside.

"Why beat bushes around?" he broke in. "Miss Moran has walked out on me and I want to get that girl for a dancing partner, Mrs. Spirinoff. Therefore, Mrs. Spirinoff, for any services which you give me toward getting

ahold of her this afternoon, I will pay you a generous commission."

"Oh, you will, will you!" Spirinova said. "And suppose I was to tell you that I wanted to get for my own son, as a dancing partner, this here Miss Gollub."

Bielawsky slapped the table with his open palm. "Gollub!" he cried. "That's the name, and the father is in the garment business. I remember it all now."

With what musicians call splendid attack, Bielawsky and his son rose from the table, leaving Spirinova to a solitary consumption of her coffee and cake and a no less solitary payment of the ensuing bill. But where Bielawsky and son were at a disadvantage was in the matter of being obliged first to consult the classified telephone directory, only to find that Mr. Gollub was not listed for the reason that he manufactured ladies' suits under the firm name of the Eagle Mfg. and Importation Company.

And since there was nothing in Mr. Gollub's personality which would suggest that imperial bird, the eagle, as even a registered trademark, Bielawsky and his son were also obliged to consult members of the garment industry before they ascertained that Mr. Gollub's first name was Aaron and that he resided at Riverside Drive and 108th Street. It was therefore more than three hours later before they

alighted from a bus at that windy corner, and by bribing the elevator boy of the Gollub apartment house, presented themselves at the Gollub doorway unannounced.

Even before they rang the Gollub bell, they could detect the sound of voices in the Gollub apartment, and one of these voices possessed the timbre of an operatic mezzo soprano. Consequently, when the Gollub maid opened the door, they brushed unceremoniously past her, for they conceived that this was no time for delaying formalities. They were quite right.

"Suppose you did promise the *Italiener,* popper," said this mezzo soprano voice as they entered. "Think, popper, what it means to your son and this sweet girl."

"It means fifteen hundred a week—that's what it means," said a brassy and quite uncultivated baritone which issued from a face that might be described as of steel construction throughout, both fire- and burglar-proof, and which with a sinking of his indurated heart, George Biel immediately recognized as that of Al Zinberg, a vaudeville agent who specialized on high-priced dancers.

"Furthermore," Zinberg continued, "I got the low-down from reliable parties that on account of this here split between Biel and Moran, the act is out of 'Be Careful, Girly,' and if you say the word, Miss Gollub, you and

Lou are in, and a big hit before you rehearse even."

Goldie sat on a sofa next to her proposed dancing partner and unconsciously their fingers were entwined in as ardent a clasp as when last they met three hours before.

"But mommer *leben,*" Spirinoff protested, and such was the change his feelings had undergone since noon that he, too, clasped the gilded fingers of Spirinova, "suppose Mr. Gollub should object to his daughter travelling round the country with our boy."

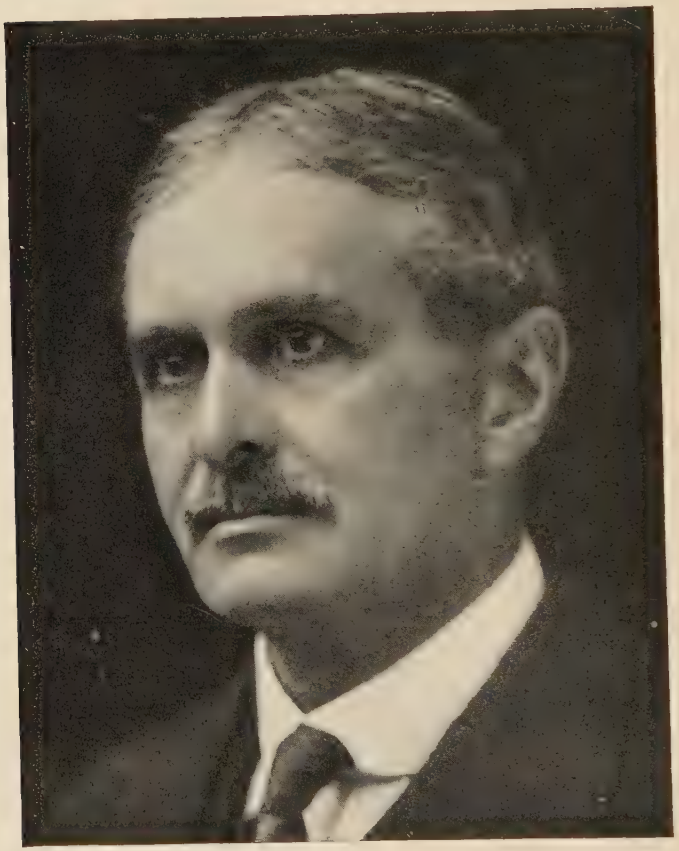
Mr. Gollub, who had been hastily summoned from his place of business, stood looking at the steamers of the United States Shipping Board which were plainly visible from Mr. Gollub's front windows. To Mr. Gollub they seemed to be his daughter's ships and they were all coming home freighted with precious jewels.

"How old did you say your son was?" he asked Spirinova.

"He's nineteen," she said, "but then his popper and me was married when we was eighteen even."

Mr. Gollub turned and surveyed the young people sitting on the sofa at the precise moment when Bielawsky and son tiptoed down the hall and closed the door behind them.

"Well!" Gollub said as though thinking aloud. "Why not?"



J. RUSSELL & SONS

ROBERT HICHENS

FOREWORD

I HAVE chosen out of the many stories I have written "The Charmer of Snakes." I do not say it is the best of my stories. I do not know which is the best. But it is a tale that I have always rather liked, perhaps partly because it recalls one of the first journeys I ever made in North Africa, whither I have returned so many times since.

In those days there was not a carriage road in the whole of Morocco, and one could not take a step outside of Tangier without being guarded by soldiers.

After staying in Tangier for ten days with a friend I went for a camping expedition. I went where Claire and Renfrew went.

Beyond Tetuan in the plain I stayed many days, and in the market-place of Tetuan I saw the Charmer of Snakes described in the story. He made an impression upon me which has never faded, although since then I have seen many snake-charmers in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt.

The man was really wonderful. Perhaps, as Claire hinted, he was a great actor. But he didn't seem like an actor.

When the story was published our great English actor, Sir Henry Irving, read it, and told me he would like to have a play written from it. He died before this project was satisfied.

Morocco was very wonderful in those days. It is wonderful now but there are motor roads. One now never travels on horseback, as I did in the far-away

days. Some of the sense of danger and of romance has departed.

And my Charmer of Snakes—where is he? Sometimes when I am in North Africa among the palms or the burning sands, I listen for the tune that drew Claire away to her destiny.

But I have never heard it again.

The CHARMER *of* SNAKES

By Robert Hichens

I

The petulant whining of the jackals prevented Renfrew from sleeping. At first he lay still on his camp-bed, staring at the orifice of the bell tent, which was only partially covered by the canvas flap let down by Mohammed after he had bidden his master good night. Behind the tent the fettered mules stamped on the rough, dry ground, and now and then the heavy rustling of a wild boar could be heard, as it shuffled through the scrub toward the water that lay in the hollow beyond the camp. The wayward songs of the Moorish attendants had died into silence. They slept, huddled together and shrouded in their *djelabs*. But their wailing rapture of those old triumphant days when on the heights above Granada, beneath the eternal snows, their brethren walked

From Robert Hichens's Bye-Ways. Copyright 1897 by Dodd, Mead & Company. By permission of the publishers.

as conquerors, had been succeeded by the cries of the uneasy beasts that throng the mountains between Tangier and Tetuan. And Renfrew said to himself that the jackals kept him from sleeping. He lay still and wondered if Claire were awake in her tent close by. If so, if her dark eyes were unclouded, what journeys must her imagination be making! She was so sensitive to sound of any kind. A cry moved her sometimes with a swift violence that alarmed those around her. The message of a note of music shut one door on her soul, opened another, and let her in to strange regions in which she chose to be lonely.

How amazing it was to think that Claire, with all her serpentine beauty, all her celebrity, all the legends that clung to her fame, all the wild caprices of which two worlds had talked for years—that Claire was hidden away three feet off, beneath the canvas shield that looked like a moderate-sized mushroom from the Kasba on the hill. How amazing to think she was no longer Claire Duvigne, but Claire Renfrew. Her cheated audiences sighed in London where a week ago she was acting. And while they sighed, she slept in this wild valley of Morocco, or lay awake and heard the jackals whining among the dwarf palms. And she was his. She belonged to him. He had the right to hold her — this thin, pale wonder of night and

of fame — in his arms, and to kiss the lips from which came at will the coo of a dove or the snarl of a tigress. Although Renfrew could not sleep, he fell into a dream. Indeed, ever since he had married Claire, a week ago, his life had been a dream. When the goddess suddenly bends down to the worshipper, and says: "Don't pray to me any more—sit on my throne by my side!"—the worshipper exchanges one form of devotion for another, so deep and so different that for a while his ordinary faculties seem frozen, his life goes in shadowy places. Renfrew was not a man of deep imagination, but he had enough of the dangerous and dear quality to make him full of interest in Claire's bonfires of the mind. He sunned himself in the sparks which flew from her, even as the phlegmatic man in the pit bathes in the fury of some queen of the stage. He adored partly because he scarcely understood.

And then, at this moment he was in the throes of a most unexpected honeymoon. Claire, after refusing to have anything to do with him for two years or more, had suddenly married him in such a hurry that, though London gasped, Renfrew gasped still more. She had sent for him one night, from her dressing-room, between the third act and the fourth of an angry drama of passion. He came in and found her sitting in an armchair by a table, on which lay a note

containing his last proposal, and a dagger with which she was about to commit a stage murder that had carried her glory to the four quarters of the universe. Her face was covered with powder, and in her long white dress she looked like a phantom. As she spoke to him, she ran her thin fingers mechanically up and down the blade of the dagger. When Renfrew was in the room, and the door shut, she looked up at him and said:

"Desmond, I'm going to frighten you more than I shall frighten the audience out there."

And she pointed toward the hidden stage.

"How?" he said, looking at her hand and at the dagger.

"I'm going to marry you."

Renfrew turned paler than she was.

"Ah!" she cried. "You go white?"

"No, no," he murmured. "But—but I can't believe it."

"I will marry you when you like, tomorrow, whenever you can get a licence."

"Oh, Claire!"

Suddenly she got up.

"Take me away from here," she said. "From this heat and noise. Take me to some place where it is wild and desolate. I want to be in starlight, with people who know nothing of me and my trumpery talent. O God, Desmond, you don't know how a woman can get

to hate being famous! I should like to act tonight to a circle of savages who had never heard of me and of my glory."

"Curtain's up!" sang a shrill voice outside.

Claire picked up the dagger.

"Well?" she said. "Shall it be——?"

"Ah, yes—yes!" Renfrew answered in a choked voice.

She smiled and glided out, like a white snake, he thought.

And now—yes, those were really jackals whining, and Claire slept, surrounded by a circle of Moors, under the stars of Morocco.

Renfrew trembled at the astounding surprises of life. Now the devil of the night—thought—had filled his veins with fever. He got up softly, drew on his clothes, unfastened the canvas flap, and emerged, like a shadow, from the mouth of the tent. The night was dewy and cool. All the heaven was full of eyes. The line of tethered mules looked like a black hedge in whose shelter the group of tents was pitched. A low fire, held in a cup of earth, was dying down in the distance, and as Renfrew came out a lanky dog slunk off among the bushes that clothed the low hills on every side.

Renfrew stood quite still. He was bareheaded, and the breeze caught at his thick brown hair, and seemed to tug it like a rough child at play with a kindly elder. His eyes were

turned toward the tiny peaked tent which shrouded Claire. A small moon half-way up the sky sent out a beam which faintly illuminated this home of a wanderer, and Renfrew thought the beam was like a silver finger pointing at this wonderful creature whom glory had so long attended. Such beings must walk in light. Nature herself protests against their endeavours to shroud themselves even for a moment in darkness. He drew close to the tent, and listened for Claire's low breathing. But he could not hear it. Perhaps she was awake then.

"Claire!" he called, in a low voice.

There was no answer. Renfrew hesitated and glanced round the little camp. It was just then that he noticed the absence of two figures which had been standing like statues near his tent when he went to bed. These were soldiers sent from the nearest village to guard the camp from marauders during the night. Clad in earth-coloured rags, shrouded in loose robes that looked like musty dressing-gowns, with fez on head, and musket in hand, they had seemed devoutly intent on doing their duty then. But now—where were they? Renfrew strolled among the tents, expecting to find them squatting near the fire smoking cigarettes, or playing some Spanish game of cards. But they had vanished. He returned, and posted himself

again by the door of Claire's rude bedroom, saying to himself that he would be her guard. Those Moorish vagabonds had deserted her. They cared nothing for the safety of this jewel, whom the whole civilised world cherished. But in his heart glowed a passion of protection for her. And then he gazed again at the impenetrable canvas wall that divided him from her. Only two hours ago he had held her in his arms and kissed her lips, yet already he felt as if a river of years flowed between them. He began to torture himself deliberately, as lovers will, by the imagination of non-existent evils. Suppose Claire possessed the power of a fairy, and could evaporate at will into the spaces of the air, leaving no trace behind. She might then have departed, have faded into the scented silence and darkness of this land so strange and desolate. Renfrew supposed the departure an actual fact. What a loneliness would fill his night then; if that little tent stood empty, if that slim sleeper were removed from the camp round which the jackals sat on their tiny haunches, whining like peevish spirits. He trembled beneath the weight of this absurd supposition, revelling in the intolerable with the folly of worship. Gradually he forced himself on step by step along the fanciful path till he had assured his imagination that Claire was really gone, and that he was just such a travel-

ling Englishman as may come alone across the Straits, take out a camp, and spend his days in stalking wild boar or shooting duck, his nights in the heavy slumber of complete weariness. And, at length, having gained a ghastly summit of imaginative despair, he suddenly stretched forth his hand, unhooked the canvas that shrouded Claire's tent door, and peeped cautiously in, courting the delicious revulsion of feeling which he would secure when he saw her half-defined form in the shadow of the leaning roof that hid her from the stars.

He bent forward with greedy anxiety. But the pale and tragic face he looked for did not greet his eyes. The tent was empty.

Renfrew stood for a moment holding back the canvas flap with one hand. This denial calmly offered to his expectation bewildered him. He was confused, and for a moment scarcely thought at all. Then his mind broke away with the violence of a dog unleashed, and ran a wild course of surmises. He thought first of rousing the camp and organising an immediate search. Then he remembered the absence of the two soldiers who ought to be guarding the tents and the mules. Claire gone, those soldiers absent! He linked the two facts together, and turned white and sick. But he did not rouse the camp. Indeed, he thanked God that all the men were sleeping. He

sprang softly back from the tent, turned on his heel, and stole out of the camp so silently that he scarcely seemed a living thing. The ground toward the water was boggy and spongy, and the scent of the thickly growing myrtles was heavy in the air. Renfrew brushed through them swiftly. He heard the harsh snuffling of a boar, and the tread of its feet in the mud at the waterside. And these sounds filled the night with a sense of unknown dangers. Darkness, a wild country, wild men, wild beasts, and his beautiful Claire out somewhere alone, near him, perhaps, yet hidden behind the impenetrable veil of darkness. He saw her fainting, struggling, crying out for him. He saw her silent and dead, and frenzy seized him. She was not here by the water. And with a gesture of despair he turned back. Low and rounded hills faced him on all sides, covered with a dense undergrowth of palms and close-growing shrubs that looked almost like black velvet in the night. On one, the highest, was perched the native village from which the soldiers had come. Dogs were barking in it incessantly. It seemed to Renfrew that Claire might have been conveyed there by these ruffians; and he began hastily to ascend in the direction of the dogs' acute voices. He stumbled among the palms at first; but, mounting higher, he came into the eye of the moon, and was swal-

lowed up in a shrouded silver radiance. The camp faded away below him, and he felt the breeze with greater force. Yet its breath was warm. Could Claire feel it? Did she see the moon? Now the dogs were evidently close by. The village must be behind that big clump of trees. Renfrew sprang upward, passed through them, suddenly drew a great breath and stood still.

Beyond the trees there was a small clearing that almost corresponded to our English notion of a village green. On the near side of it was the clump of trees in whose shadow Renfrew now stood. On the far side of it was the Moorish village, a minute collection of low huts like hovels, featureless and filthy. The moon streamed over the clearing and lit up faintly a cluster of seated figures that formed a good-sized circle. The figures looked broad and almost shapeless, for they were all smothered in long, voluminous robes, and over all the heads great hoods were drawn which hid the faces of the wearers. They were absolutely motionless, and differed little from the more distant clumps of dwarf palms that grew everywhere among the huts. Only they possessed the curiously sullen aspect of things alive but entirely motionless. It was not this living Stonehenge of Morocco, however, which caused Renfrew to catch his breath and rooted him in the shadow.

In the centre of the circle, lit up by the moon, there stood something that might have been a phantom, it was so thin, so tall, so white-faced, so strange in its movements. It was a woman, and long black hair flowed down to its waist—night standing back from that moon, vague and spectral, the face. In this human night and moon, great sombre eyes gleamed with a sort of fatigued beauty. This spectre stretched out its long arms in weird gesticulations and sometimes swayed its body as if it moved to music. And from its lips came a soft and liquid stream of golden words that mingled with the acid barking of the dogs, some of which crept furtively about on the outskirts of the serene hooded circle of the listeners. This murmuring spectre was Claire. She was girt about with silently staring Moors. And she was in the act of delivering one of her most famous recitations, which she had last given at a monster morning performance before Royalties in London, on a sultry day of the season. As this fact broke upon Renfrew's mind, he seemed for a moment to be back in the hot dressing-room in which Claire had said: "I will marry you." He seemed to hear her passionate exclamation: "I should like to act tonight to a circle of savages!" The hillmen of this part of Morocco may not be savages, but they are fierce and wild and ruthless. And now they hung upon the lips

that had spoken to London, Paris, Vienna, New York—but never before to such an audience as this. The recitation was a description of the performance of a snake-charmer, his harangue to his reptiles and to the crowd watching him, and his departure into the solitude of the great desert, there to obtain, in communion with its spirit, the power to work greater miracles, and to charm not alone the serpents that dwell among the rocks and in the forests, but also men, women, little children—the power to thrust a human world into a kennel of plaited straw, to take it out in sections at pleasure, and to make it dance, pose, and posture, like a viper tamed into a species of ballet-dancer. In this recitation the peculiar and almost serpentine fascination of Claire had full liberty. She represented the snake-charmer as a being who through long and intimate association with snakes had become like them, lithe, fantastic, and unexpected, soft and deadly, by turns sleepy and violent, a coil of glistening velvet and a length of cast-iron, tipped with a poisoned fang and the music of a hiss. His fanaticism, his greed for money, the passionate prayer to Sidi Mahomet that flowed from his lips while his terrible eyes searched an imaginary crowd in search of the richest man or the most excited woman in it, his bursts of dancing humour, his deadly stillness, his playful familiarity with his

dangerous captives, his mesmeric anger when they were sullen and recalcitrant, his relapse into the savage churchwarden with the collecting box when his "show" was at an end—every side, every subtlety of such a creature Claire could give with the certainty of genius. As you watched her, you beheld the snakes, you beheld their master. Even at the end you almost saw the vast and trackless desert open its haggard arms to receive its child, who passed from the crowd to the silence in which alone he could learn to fascinate the crowd. At the great morning performance in London, a prince who knew the East had said to Claire, "Miss Duvigne, you must have lived with snake-charmers. You must have studied them for months."

"I never saw one in my life," she answered truthfully.

And now she gave her performance to those who, in the dingy market squares of their white-walled cities, had seen the snakes dance and had heard the prayer to Sidi Mahomet. And they squatted in the moonbeams, immobile as goblins carved in dusky oak. Yet they inspired Claire. From his hiding-place Renfrew could note this. She had let her genius loose upon them, as she had let her cloud of hair loose upon her shoulders. The frosty touch of smart conventionality bewilders and half paralyses the utterly unconventional. Often Renfrew

had heard Claire curse the smiling and self-contented Londoners who thronged the stalls of her theatre. She felt, with the swiftness of genius, the retarding hand they laid upon her winged talents. She had no inclination to curse these hooded figures gathered round her in the night. Staring upon her with the fixed concentration of children who behold, rather than hear, a fairy-tale, they paid her the fine compliment of an undivided attention. It was a curious scene and one that stirred in Renfrew a deep excitement. He watched it with a double sense, of living keenly and of dreaming deeply. Claire gave to him the first sense, the moon and the motionless Moors the second. But presently one of the hooded statues stirred and swayed, and there mingled with the voice of Claire a twisted melody, so thin and wandering that it was like a thread binding a bundle of gold. It pierced the night, and enclosed the words of the reciter, one sound prisoned by another lighter and less than itself. The dogs had ceased to bark now, and only the voice that told of the snake-charmer's journey into the desert, and this whispering Moorish tune, plucked by dark fingers from the strings of a rough lute, moved in the night, till Claire ceased. The lute continued for a few bars, like the symphony that closes a song, and then it too ceased abruptly on a note that brought no

feeling of finale to modern ears. For an instant Claire stood motionless in the centre of the human circle. Then her arms fell to her sides. She moved swiftly toward the trees in whose shadow Renfrew was watching. The Moors made a gap, and as she passed out all the shapeless figures were suddenly elongated and crowded together upon her footsteps. As Claire came into the blackness of the trees, Renfrew stretched out his hand and clasped her arm. She stopped with no tremor, and faced him.

"Claire!"

"What, it is you, Desmond! I thought you were asleep."

"When you were awake? You have given me a fright. I came to your tent; I found it empty. The soldiers were gone."

"They were guarding me up the hill. I could not sleep. I wandered out. How hot your hand is!"

Renfrew released her. All the Moors had gathered round them like enormous shadows.

"My audience has come to the stage door!" Claire said.

Her eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"They are a beautiful audience," she added; "and the orchestra, the soft music—that was better than London fiddles."

"Come back to the camp, Claire."

"Very well."

He drew her arm through his, and led her out into the moonlight and down the hill. Two shadows detached themselves from the silent assembly and followed them, barefooted, over the dewy grass. They were the soldiers. Claire looked back and saw them.

"I shall give those men a handful of pesetas, tomorrow," she said.

They reached the camp and sat down on two folding chairs in the shadow of Claire's tent. The soldiers stood near, gazing intently at them. Claire sat in a curved attitude. She had drawn a dark veil over her hair, and her enormous and tragic eyes were turned sombrely on Renfrew. She looked fatigued, as she often did after acting a long and passionate part. To Renfrew she seemed more wonderful than ever. He could scarcely believe that he was her husband.

"You have had your circle of savages," he said.

"Yes."

"And you liked them?"

"Do you think they liked me? I wonder if there was a snake-charmer among them. When I came to Sidi Mahomet I thought perhaps they would kill me. That thought made me pray better than I can in London."

"You could charm snakes more certainly than any Arab," Renfrew said.

"I dare say. Perhaps I shall try at Tetuan. Good night, Desmond."

She vanished into the tent. It seemed that she evaporated as Sarah Bernhardt evaporated in the fourth act of "La Tosca."

II

On the following day they rode across the mountain to Tetuan. They started in the dawn. Claire's eyes were heavy. She came languidly out from the tent door to mount her horse, and when she touched Renfrew he felt that her hand was cold like an icicle. He looked at her anxiously.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No, Desmond."

He lifted her into the saddle.

"You haven't slept," he said.

She looked down at him as she slowly gathered up her reins.

"Unfortunately, I have," she replied.

Before Renfrew had time to express surprise at this unexpected rejoinder, she had struck her horse with the whip and trotted off over the grass in the direction of the white Kasba that gleamed on the hill under the kiss of the rising

sun. He leaped into the saddle, and followed her. The path into which they came was narrow, winding through wild fig-trees and olives, and constantly ascending. Claire did not turn her head, and Renfrew could not ride by her side. He watched her thin and sinuous figure swaying slightly in obedience to the motion of her horse, which scrambled over the rough path with the activity of a wildcat. In front of her their personal attendant, Mohammed, rode on a huge grey mule, and sang to himself incessantly in a deep and murmuring voice. Once or twice Renfrew spoke to Claire, but she did not seem to hear him. He resolved to ask about her sleep when they gained some plateau on which they could rest for a moment. At present it was necessary to concentrate his attention on his horse and on the dangers of the road.

When the sun was high in the heavens and they were high on the mountain, above a gorge in which the scrub grew densely, and great bushes starred with yellow and white flowers hid the rocks and made a home for birds, Mohammed called a halt. Renfrew lifted Claire to the ground. The men passed on toward Tetuan with their camp, and Claire sank down on a gay rug beneath the shade of a huge white umbrella, which was pitched on a square of level ground and circled with luxuriant vege-

tation. Renfrew lay at her feet and lit his pipe, while Mohammed, the dragoman, and one of the porters squatted at a little distance, and began to play cards in a cloud of kief. Claire was fanning herself slowly with an enormous Spanish fan in which all gay colours met. She still looked very tired. The shuffle of the descending mules died away down the mountain, and a silence, through which the butterflies flitted, fell round them.

"Is this journey too much for you, Claire?" Renfrew asked.

"No. I can rehearse for six hours in London, surely I can ride for six here."

"But you look tired."

"Because, as I told you, I slept too much last night."

"What does that mean?"

She stretched herself on the rug with the easy grace of a woman who has trained her body to carry to the eyes of others, as a message, all the moods of passion and of peace. Then she leaned her cheek on her hand.

"In the darkness of the tent, Desmond, I slept and did not know it. I believed that I lay awake. I thought I still could hear the jackals, and the stamping of the mules. But, really, I slept."

"How do you know that?"

"Because of what I am going to tell you.

The wind blew about the canvas door, and when it bulged outward I could see on each side of it a tiny section of the night outside, a bit of a bush, blades of short grass moving, a ray of the moon, the slinking shadow of one of the dogs from the village."

"Yes."

"Presently there came, I thought, a stronger gust than usual. It tore the canvas flap from the pegs, and the whole thing blew up, leaving the entrance quite open. Then it blew down again. It was up only for a minute. During that minute I had seen that a very tall man was standing outside the tent."

"One of the soldiers."

"If I had been awake it might have been."

"You mean that all this was a dream?"

"I mean that I slept last night, and that I wish I hadn't."

She turned her great eyes on Renfrew, holding the red, green, and yellow fan so that it concealed the lower part of her face. And he looked at her, staring at him like some tragic stranger above the rampart of an unknown city, and wondered whether she was acting to him in the sun. On the forefinger of the hand that held up the fan a huge black pearl perched in a circle of gold. Renfrew had often noticed it on the stage, when Claire lifted the silver dagger to kill the man who loved her in the play.

"The door of your tent was securely closed when I got up and came out this morning," he said.

"Oh, yes."

She spoke with the utmost indifference. Then she added more sharply:

"Desmond, has it ever occurred to you that I am serpentine?"

He was startled and made no answer.

"Well—has it?"

"Yes," he said truthfully.

"Why?"

"Everyone thinks so. You are so thin. You move so silently. Your body is so elastic and controlled. You always look as if you could glide into places where other women could never go, and be at home in attitudes they could never assume."

"But I'm an actress—my body is trained, you know, to lie, to fall, as I choose."

"Other actresses don't give one the same impression."

"No," she said thoughtfully. "My peculiar physique has a great deal to do with it."

"Of course, and there's something more than that, something mental."

Claire's heavy eyes grew more thoughtful. The white lids fluttered lower over them till they looked like the eyes of one half asleep. She lay in silence, plunged in a reverie that was

deep and dark. In this reverie she forgot to move her fan, which dropped from her hand and fell softly upon the rug. Renfrew did not interrupt her. His worship had learned to wait upon her moods. A huge dragon-fly passed on its journey toward the far blue range of the Atlas Mountains. It whirred in its haste, and its burnished body shone in the sunshine between its gleaming wings. Claire snatched at it with her hand, but missed it.

"I should like to wear it as a jewel," she said.

Then she turned slowly again toward Renfrew, and continued her nocturne as if it had never been broken off.

"The canvas flap fell down again over the doorway, Desmond, and it seemed that just then the breeze died away, expiring in that angry gust. I could not see anything but the interior of the tent, and that only very dimly. But this man outside. I wanted to see him."

"Did you recognise that he was not one of the soldiers, then?"

"Perfectly. He was not dressed as they are. They were entirely muffled up with hoods drawn forward above their faces. And in their hands one could see their guns. This man was bareheaded, and looked half naked. And in his hands—"

She stopped meditatively.

"Was there anything in his hands?"

"Well—yes, there was."

"What?"

"I wanted to know what it was. But at first I only lay quite still and wished the wind would come again and blow the flap up so that I could see out. But it had quite gone down. The canvas did not even quiver."

"Was it near dawn?"

"I haven't an idea. Does the breeze sink then?"

"Very often."

"Ah! Perhaps it was then. Oh, but you'll see in a minute what nonsense it is to think about that. I lay still, as I said, for some time, waiting for the breeze. And when it wouldn't come, I made up my mind that I must arrive at a decision either to turn my face on the pillow and go to sleep, or else to get up, go to the tent door, and look out."

"To see this man?"

"Exactly."

"Which did you do?"

"Turned my face on the pillow."

"And went off to sleep?"

"No, grew most intensely awake—as I supposed. The pillow was like fire against my cheek. It burnt me. With the departure of the breeze the night had become suddenly most intolerably hot. I turned over on my back and

lay like that. Then I felt as if there was sand on the sheets."

"Sand! Impossible! We aren't in the desert."

"No. But it seemed as if I lay in hot sand. I shifted my position, but it made no difference. I sat up. The tent door was still closed. I listened. All those dogs had ceased to bark. There wasn't a sound. Even the jackals had left off whining. Then I slipped out of bed and threw that rose-coloured Moorish cloak over me. It rustled just as a thing rustles in grass, Desmond."

She looked at him with a sort of peculiar significance, and as if she expected him to gather something definite from the remark.

"A thing in grass," he repeated, wondering. "What sort of thing?"

But Claire avoided the question. She had taken up the fan again, and was opening and shutting it with a quiet and careful sort of precision as she went on in a low and even voice:

"I disliked this rustling, and held the cloak tightly together with my hands. I felt as if the man outside the tent had been waiting to hear that very little noise."

"The rustling?"

"Yes. And that when he heard it he smiled to himself. I didn't intend he should hear it

again though, and as I glided toward the tent door, I held the cloak very tight and away from my body. And I don't think I can have made any noise. You know how softly I can move when I choose?"

"Yes."

"When I got to the door, I waited. I could not hear the man; but I felt that he was still there, just on the other side of the flap."

Renfrew leaned forward on the rug. He felt deeply interested, perhaps only because Claire was the narrator. She held him much as she could hold an audience in a theatre, by her pose, her hands, her pale, almost weary face, her heavy sombre eyes, even more than by any words she chanced to be uttering. She could make anything seem vitally important if she chose, simply by her manner. Renfrew's pipe had gone out; but he did not know it, and still kept it between his lips.

"I waited for some time by the flap," Claire continued calmly. "I was going to lift it presently, I knew; but I could not do it at once. The man and I were standing, I suppose, for full five minutes divided only by that strip of canvas. I tried not to breathe audibly, and I could not hear him breathe. At last I resolved to see him, and considered how I should do so. If I remained standing and looked out, I should have to push the flap quite away and my eyes

would be nearly on a level with his. He would certainly see me. I didn't wish that. I didn't intend at all that he should see me. Therefore I resolved to lie down."

"On the ground?"

"Yes, quite flat, and to raise the bottom of the flap gently an inch or two. This would enable me to see him without being seen, if I did it without noise. I dropped down quite softly. Do you remember my death in 'Camille'?"

Renfrew nodded.

"Almost like that. But the rose-coloured stuff rustled again. I wished I hadn't put it on. I raised the flap very slightly and peeped out. Do you know what I felt like just then, Desmond?"

"What?"

"Just like a snake in ambush. When my cloak rustled, it was the grass against my body. I lay in cover, and could see my enemy like a creature in a forest, or a reptile in scrub."

She glanced round at the bushes and the densely growing palms.

"Yes, I lay there like a snake in the grass."

She stretched herself out on the rug as she spoke, with her head toward Renfrew and her eyes fastened on his.

"I saw first the feet of the man close to my eyes. His feet were almost black and bare.

His legs were bare. My glance travelled up him, and I saw that his chest and his arms were bare too. He was clothed in a sort of loose rough garment, the colour of sacking, that fell into a kind of hood behind; and he looked enormously powerful. That struck me very much—his power."

"Did you see his face?"

"Quite well. It was the face of a man watching and listening with the closest attention. He was smiling slightly, too, as if something that had just happened had satisfied him. I knew he had heard the rustle of my robe as I slipped to the ground."

"But why should that please him?"

"It told him that I was there, that I was attentive too."

Renfrew's face slightly darkened.

"As I looked, I saw what he was holding in his hands."

"What was it—a dagger—a staff?"

"A serpent."

Renfrew could not repress an exclamation.

"Very large and striped. Its skin was like shot silk in the moonlight. It writhed softly between his hands, and turned its flat head from side to side. It seemed to be trying to bend down toward where I lay. Its tongue shot out like a length of ribbon out of one of those wooden winders that you buy in cheap

shops. I should think its body was quite five feet long, and its colour seemed to change as it turned about. Sometimes it was pink, then it looked dull green and almost black. Once it wriggled down so near to the ground that I could see two fangs in its open mouth like hooks, and the roof of its mouth was flesh-colour."

"How abominable!" said Renfrew softly.

"I didn't feel it so at all," Claire said. "I wanted it to come to me—back into the grass where such things are safe. But the man would not let it go. He thrust it into his breast. He wanted to have his hands free."

"Good God, Claire—what for? Did he——?"

She smiled at his sudden violence, which showed his interest.

"When the snake was safe, he drew out, still smiling and listening, a little pipe that looked as if it were made of straw, very common and dirty. He held it up to his black lips, and began to play very softly and sleepily. Desmond, the tune he played was charmed. It was a tune composed—for—for——"

She broke off.

"You know the Pied Piper had his tune," she said; "the rats had to follow it. Well, this tune was for the serpents."

"To charm them, you mean?"

"Wisely—dangerously—almost irresistibly, perhaps in time, Desmond, quite, quite irresistibly. There is a music for all creatures, all reptiles, birds—everything that lives; this was for the snakes."

"Well, but, Claire, how did you know that?"

She looked at him with a sort of dull amusement and pity in her half-shut eyes.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"I knew it because the tune charmed me, Desmond."

"Ah, you are acting! I half suspected it from the first," Renfrew exclaimed almost roughly.

He sat up as a man who has been lying under a spell stirs when the spell is broken. Now he knew that his pipe was out, and he felt for his match-box. But Claire still kept her eyes fixed on him, and laid her hand on his arm gently.

"No, I am not acting," she said. "The tune charmed me. You see, I am a woman; and there are many women who feel at moments that what attracts some special creature, thing, of the so-called world without a soul, attracts them too. Some men can whistle a woman as they would a dog, can't they?"

"Perhaps."

"Yes, and some men can charm a woman as they could charm a serpent."

"I don't understand you, Claire."

"You don't choose to. The animal is in us all, hidden deftly by nature, the artful dodger of the scheme of creation, Desmond; and we know it when the right tune is played to summon it from its slumber in the nest of the human body. Only the right tune can waken it."

"The animal! But——"

"Or the reptile, perhaps. What does it matter? This was the right tune for me. I lay there like a snake in the grass and it thrilled me! And all the time the black man smiled and listened for the rustling at his feet. You look black, Desmond! How absurd of you to be angry!"

And she closed her fingers over his hand till the frown died out of his face.

"The tune seemed to draw me to the man. I understood just how he had captured the serpent that lay hidden in his bosom. It had once lain in ambush as I lay now, long ago perhaps, in the desert among the rocks, on the sand, Desmond."

"Ah, the sand!" he said, remembering suddenly the strange feeling Claire had described as coming upon her when she was trying to sleep.

"Yes. And he had drawn it from the sand to the oasis among the palms where he stood playing, till he heard its rustling in the grass about his feet as it glided nearer to him, and nearer, and nearer, till at last it reared up its body, and wound up him and round him, and laid its flat head between his great hands. Yes, that was how it came."

"You fancy."

"I know. But I would not go. I determined that I would not, and I lay perfectly still. But all the time I longed to go. I had an almost irresistible passion for movement toward that tune. It seemed to me a stream of music into which I yearned to plunge, and drown and die. And it flowed up there at the man's lips! The longing increased as he piped the tune, over and over and over again, almost under his breath. I was sick with it, and it hurt me because I resisted it. And at last I knew that resisting it would kill me. I must either go, or not go, and die. There was no alternative. That music simply claimed me. It had the right to. And if I denied that right I should cease. I did deny it."

She shuddered in the sun, then added, almost harshly:

"Like a fool."

"And then, Claire, then?"

"It seemed to me that I died in most hor-

rible pain. I lived once more when you said, outside my tent, 'Claire, time to get up.' You see, I slept too much last night."

And again she shuddered. A look of relief shot into Renfrew's face.

"All this came from your mad performance to those Moors," he said. "You impersonate so vividly that even sleep cannot release your genius and bring it out from the world which you have deliberately forced it to enter."

"But, Desmond, I impersonated the charmer of the snake, not the snake itself."

"Oh, in a dream the mind always wanders a little from the event that has caused the dream. It is like a faulty mimic who strives to reproduce with exactitude and slightly fails. Time to go, Absalem?"

The dragoman had come up.

As they rode down the mountain a strange thing occurred, strange at least in connection with Claire's narrative of the night. Mohammed, who was riding just in front of them, pulled up his mule beside a thicket at the wayside, and, turning his head, signed to them to be silent. Then, pursing his lips, he whistled a shrill little tune. In a moment an answer came from the thicket; Claire glanced at Renfrew with a slight smile. Here was a sort of sidelight of reality thrown upon her dream and upon their conversation. Mohammed whistled

again. The echo followed. And then suddenly a bird flew out, almost into his face, and, startled, swerved and darted away across the gorge into the dense woods beyond.

"A charm for birds," Claire murmured to Renfrew, as they rode on. "The summoning tune—what can resist it?"

"Claire," he said, almost reproachfully, "you speak like a fatalist."

"And I believe I am one," she answered. "Destiny is not only a phantom but also a fact. Mine is marked out for me and known——"

"To whom? Not to yourself?"

"Oh, no!"

"To whom, then?"

"To the hidden force that directs all things."

"I am your destiny."

"Ah, Desmond—or Morocco. I feel today as if I shall never see England again, or a civilised audience such as I have known."

And then she seemed to fall into a waking dream. Even Renfrew felt drowsy, the air was so intensely hot and the motion of the horses so monotonous. And Mohammed's deep voice was never silent. It buzzed like a bourdon in the glare of the noontide, till, far away on the hillside, they saw white Tetuan facing the plain, the river moving stagnantly toward the sea, the great fields of corn in which strange flowers grew, and the giant range of shaggy

mountains, swimming in a mist of gold that looked like spangled tissue.

III

THE camp was pitched beyond the city in the green plain that lies between Tetuan and the sea. From the tents Renfrew and Claire saw the trains of camels and donkeys passing slowly along the highroad toward the steep and stony hill that leads up to the lower city gate, the whitewashed summer palaces of the wealthy Moors, nestling in gardens, among green fields and groves of acacias, olives and almond-trees, the far-off line of blue water on the one hand and the fairylike and ivory town upon the other. Clouds of brown dust flew up in the air, and the hoarse cry of "Balak! Balak!" made a perpetual and distant music. Far more strange and barbarous was this city than Tangier. All traces of Europe had faded away. Thousands of years seemed now to stand like a wall between the continents, and the hordes of dark and fanatical Moslems gazed upon the great actress and her husband as we gaze at wild animals whose aspects and whose habits are strange to us.

"I know now what it is to feel like an unclean dog," Claire said as they sat at dinner under

the stars that night, after their halting progress through the filthy alleys of the white fairy-land on the hillside. "It is a grand sensation. I suppose children enjoy it, too. That must be why they like making mudpies."

"Tomorrow is market-day, Absalem tells me," Renfrew said. "We will spend it in the town, and you can feel unclean to your heart's content—you!"

He looked at her and laughed low, with the pride of a lover in a beautiful woman who is his own.

"They ought to fall down and worship you," he said.

"Moors worship a woman! Desmond, you are mad!"

"No, they are—they are. See, Claire, the moon is coming up already. Can it be shining on Piccadilly too, and on the façade of the theatre?"

"The theatre! I can't believe I shall ever see it again."

"Nonsense!"

"Is it? This wild country seems to have swallowed me up, and I don't feel as if it will ever disgorge me again. Desmond, perhaps there are some lands that certain people ought never to visit. For those lands love them, and, once they have seized their prey, they will never yield it up again. Poor men must often feel

that when they are dying in foreign places. It is the land which has taken them to itself as an octopus takes a drifting boat in a lonely sea. Africa!"

She had risen from her seat and moved out into the vague plain. Renfrew followed her.

"I wonder in which direction the desert lies nearest," she said. "All the strange people come in from the desert, as the strange things of life come in from the future, only one so seldom hears the tinkling bells of those deadly silent caravans in which they travel. If we could hear and see them coming, what emotions we should have!"

"There are premonitions, some men say," Renfrew answered.

"The faint bells of the caravans ringing—do you ever hear them?"

"No, Claire—never. And you?"

"I half thought I did once."

"When was that?"

"Last night. Hark! The men have finished supper and are beginning to sing. That's a song about dancing."

"Tomorrow we are going to feast the soldiers, and have an African fire."

"Splendid! I think I will leap through the flames."

Renfrew put his arm round her.

"No, no. They might singe your beauty.

And yet, you are a flame too. You have burnt your name, yourself, like a brand upon my heart."

The dancing song rang up in the moonlight like the wailing of dead masqueraders. All Moorish songs are sad and thrilling, fateful and pregnant with unrest and with forebodings.

With the daylight the Jews came, in their long and morose garments and black skull-caps, bearing bales of embroideries, slippers, and uncut jewels. When they saw the wonderful black pearl upon Claire's finger their huge eyes flamed with an avarice so fierce and open that Renfrew instinctively moved between them and Claire, as if to guard her from assault.

But the wonderful pearl was not for them.

The sun blazed furiously when they got upon their horses to ride to the Soko. Each day the season was growing hotter, and Absalem told them that there were no English in Tetuan. Nor did they set eyes on a European woman until that day when Renfrew rode back, crouching along his horse, to the villas of Tangier.

Tetuan has more than one open mouth, and when it swallows you the contemplation of a fairyland is immediately exchanged for a desperate reality of populous filth, stentorian uproar, uneven boulders, beggars, bazaars like rabbit hutches, men and children pitted with

smallpox till they appear scarcely human, lepers, Jews, pirates from the Riff Mountains, fanatics from the Ape's Hill, water-carriers, veiled, waddling women, dogs like sharp shadows, and monkeys that appear and vanish in sinister doorways with the rapidity and gestures of demons. On a market-day the city is so full that it seems as if the circling and irregular white walls must burst and disgorge the clamouring and gesticulating inhabitants into the tranquil plain below. Claire surveyed this blanched hell with a still serenity, as she had often surveyed an applauding audience at the close of her evening's task, ere she thanked them with the curious gesture that was almost a salaam, in which humility and a remote pride mingled. Noise generally gave her calm; and when passion broke from her she taught the world to be intensely silent. These alleys became like a dream to her, and the tiny interiors of the bazaars were little histories of visionary lives, some, but only a few, mysteriously beautiful. One, in a very dark place where, for some unknown cause, all voices died away till the hot air was full of a whispering stillness, brought slow tears to Claire's eyes. In the Street of the Slippers she passed a cupboard of wood raised high from the pavement, with low roof, leaning walls, and, in front, a little bar like that which fences an English baby in its

chair before the fire. In this cupboard squatted two tiny Moorish infants, sole occupants of the cupboard, with solemn faces, bending to ply their trade of pricking patterns upon rose-coloured Morocco leather. There was no beauty in the cupboard, sweetness of light, or ease. And the faces of the little boys were sad and elderly. But, placed carefully between them, was an ugly three-legged stool, on which stood two dwarf earthen jars containing two sprigs of orange flower, and, as Claire looked, one of the babes laid down his leather, lifted his jar, sniffed, with a sort of gentle resignation, at his flower, and then resumed his diligent labours, refreshed perhaps, and strengthened. In the action Claire seemed to catch sight of a little pallid soul striving to exist feebly among the slippers.

"Did you see?" she cried to Renfrew when the baby shoemakers were lost to sight.

He nodded.

"I wish I were a Moorish woman, Desmond."

"Good Heaven! Why?"

"So that I could kiss the infant who smelled the orange flower in his own language. Little artist!"

Her sudden blaze of enthusiasm was checked by the infernal Soko into which they now entered. In this unpaved square, upon which the

pitiless sun beat, the earth seemed to have come alive, to have formed itself into a thousand vague semblances of human figures, and to be shrieking, moving, twisting, gesticulating, as if striving to impart a thousand abominable secrets till now hidden from the world that walks upon its surface. As snowmen resemble the snow, so did these bargainers, these buyers, sellers, barterers, pedlars, resemble the baked earth on which they squatted. Shrouded in earth-coloured garments, they shrieked, strove, rang their bells, kicked their donkeys, elbowed their rivals, pommelled their camels, recited the Koran, or testified with frenzy, the terrific honesty of all their dealings. Here and there tents made of mud-coloured rags cast a grotesque shadow, in which broad women, hidden by veils like sacks, and dominated by straw hats a yard wide, sat huddled together and pecked at by wandering fowls. Jew boys, with long and expressive faces, their black hair plastered upon their foreheads in fringes that touched their eyes, strolled through the mob in batches, some of them reading in little books. Soudanese slave girls carried bouquets of orange flowers. In a corner some Hawadji were leaping monotonously to the thunder of a Moorish drum made of baked earth and of parchment. A sheep, escaped from the slaughterer, tumbled with piteous bleatings into a

group of half-breeds, Spanish Moors, who were playing cards near a stall covered with raw meat and great lumps of some substance that looked like lard. On a huge heap of rotten oranges and decaying fish, over which millions of flies swarmed, a number of children in close white caps were moving in some mysterious game in which two prowling cats occasionally took an unintentional part. Some Riff Arabs, fierce as tigers, tall and half-naked, stalked feverishly toward a water-carrier whose lean form, tottering with age, was almost eclipsed beneath the monstrous bladder he bore incessantly through the multitude. The horses of Renfrew and of Claire scarcely could plant their hoofs on anything that was not moving, crying, panting, or cursing; and they pulled up, and prepared to descend into this human ocean of which all the waves roared in their deafened ears. As Claire leaned to Renfrew, who stretched his arms to help her, she said to him:

"Can you swim? If not, you will certainly be drowned."

"You must not be. Cling to my arm."

They sank together to their necks in the sea. In whatever direction they looked, they saw a mass of heads, an infinite expanse of shouting mouths. But suddenly the pressure became extraordinary, the uproar ear-splitting. And with

the voices there mingled a piercing music like a continuous screech. People began to run, to trample in one direction. The drum of the leaping Hawadji was drowned by a louder drumming that came from the centre of the square. Children squeaked with excitement. The Riffians forgot to drink, and slid forward with the cushioned feet of animals in a jungle. A tempest arose, and in it a whirlpool formed. It seemed that Renfrew and Claire must be torn in pieces.

"What on earth is happening?" Renfrew exclaimed to Absalem, with the English anger our countrymen always display when trodden by a foreign element.

Absalem smiled with airy dignity, and moved forward, beckoning them to follow.

"Miracle man, all want see him," he remarked. "Great miracle man."

With consummate adroitness he drew them with him to the edge of the whirlpool. As they reached it, Renfrew felt that Claire's hand suddenly tightened upon his arm until his flesh puckered between her fingers as the flesh of a rabbit puckers in a trap. He glanced at her in astonishment. Her eyes were fixed on something, or someone, beyond them, even beyond Absalem, who was forcing people out of their way with his powerful arms and back. Ren-

frew followed her eyes, and saw the centre of the whirlpool.

This mass of humanity had now assumed the form of a rough circus, the ring of which was kept clear. And in this ring a strange figure had just appeared with upraised arms, and a manner of wild, even of frantic authority. This was a gigantic man, almost black, half-naked, with long arms, furious eyes, and legs which, though muscular, tapered at the ankles like the legs of a finely bred race-horse. His head was shaved in front, but at the back the black hair grew in a long and waving lock, and his features, magnificently cut, might have been those of a grand European of some head-strong and high-couraged race. Upon this man Claire's eyes were fixed, with an expression so strange and knowing that Renfrew turned on her with a sharp exclamation.

"Claire! Claire!"

She slowly withdrew her eyes.

"Yes, Desmond."

A question stammered on his lips; but as she smiled at him, he felt the mad absurdity of it, and was silent.

"Well, Desmond, what is it?"

"Nothing," he answered.

Absalem now claimed their attention. He was determined that they should be in the front of the crowd, and ruthlessly pushed away the

Moors who had obtained the best places, pointing at Claire and Renfrew, and wildly vociferating their mighty rank and enormous wealth. The staring mob gave way; and in a moment Claire and the miracle man stood face to face. His frenzied eyes had no sooner seen her than he too fell upon the surrounding natives, thrusting them violently to one side, and cursing them for daring to draw near to the great English gentleman and lady. In the whole mighty mob these two were the only Europeans, and they attracted as universal an attention as two Aztecs would in a Bank-Holiday gathering at the Crystal Palace. Renfrew could now see that the screeching music came from one side of the ring, where a couple of men, clothed in filthy rags, were sitting on the ground, one playing a long pipe of straw, the other beating an enormous drum. Immediately behind them a very old man, evidently a maniac, swayed his body violently backwards and forwards, and at regular intervals uttered a loud and chuckling cry that might have been the ejaculation of a tipsy schoolboy, and came strangely from withered lips, hanging loose with weakness and with age. This dancing Methuselah caught Renfrew's attention; and, for the moment, he forgot to look at the miracle man. A general outcry from the multitude made him turn his head. He saw then that the miracle man held in his

huge hands a sort of kennel of straw, the mouth of which was closed with a movable flap. Lifting this aloft, he sprang wildly round the ring, vociferating some words at the top of his voice; then, suddenly casting it down, he flung himself upon the ground, which he beat with his forehead, while he shrieked out a prayer to his patron saint for protection in the great miracle which he was about to perform.

"What is he doing?" Renfrew asked of Absalem.

"Don't you know?" Claire said.

Her eyes were gleaming with excitement as they stared at the salaaming figure that grovelled at their feet.

"No. How should I?"

"He is praying to Sidi Mahomet," she said.

And then she looked at Renfrew. He understood. At that moment, despite the excessive heat engendered by the blazing sun and the pressure of the crowd, he turned very cold, as if his body was plunged in glacier water. He thought of the tall figure that had stood before Claire's tent door in the moonbeams, the lips that had coaxed from the pipe the tune that charmed all serpents—that right tune that they must follow, which drew them from the desert sands to the grass of the oasis, till they wound up the body of this gaunt and tremendous savage, and hid themselves in his hairy

bosom. This miracle man, then, was a snake-charmer, and Claire had divined it at once. How? Renfrew put the question quickly.

"How did I know? He is the man who played outside my tent in the night, Desmond."

"The very man! Impossible."

"The very man."

"Then you were not asleep, not dreaming?"

"How can one tell? Hush!"

She spoke in the low voice of one whose attention is becoming concentrated, and who cannot endure the interruption. The charmer had now finished his petition to his god, and, standing up, thrust into his mouth a handful of some green herb, which he chewed and swallowed. Then his whole manner abruptly changed. The frenzy died out of his eyes. A calm suffused his tall and muscular body till it became strangely statuesque. His lips slowly smiled, and he raised his hands toward the glaring sky with a sublime gesture of gratitude.

"What an actor!" Renfrew heard Claire murmur softly.

He, too, had become intensely engrossed by this man in whom he, from this moment, began to see Claire: the exquisite woman whom the civilised world worshipped in the mighty savage who came from the remote depths of Morocco; the white being who played with the

minds of the capitals of Europe, in the black being who played with the reptiles of the desert and of the jungle. For Claire, guided by the spirit that ever goes before genius bearing the torch, had instinctively divined what she had never known. In London it seemed that she had entered into the very soul of this man who now stood before her. She had caught the wild graces of his bearing. She had reproduced his smile, so full of secrets and of power. She had moved as he did. She had been motionless as now he was motionless. In the sun she stood at this moment and beheld the reality of which she had been the magnificent reflection. And Renfrew felt his heart oppressed, as if clouds were closing round him.

Now the snake-charmer looked slowly all round the great circle of watching faces until his eyes rested on Claire. He had taken the straw kennel into his hands, and he softly lifted the flap, and turned it flat upon the top of the kennel, leaving the mouth open. Then he thrust one hand into this mouth, and withdrew it, holding a writhing snake whose striped satin skin changed colour in the sunshine, turning from pink to green, from green to black.

"It is the snake I saw," Claire whispered to Renfrew.

He did not reply. He seemed fascinated by the savage and the serpent. Holding the snake

at arm's length, the charmer walked softly round the circle, collecting money from the crowd. He stopped in front of Claire. The snake thrust out its flat head toward her. She did not shrink from it; and the charmer cried aloud some words that seemed like praise of her beauty and of her composure. She gave him a piece of gold. Renfrew gave him nothing.

Then, standing once more in the centre of the circle, he burst into a frantic incantation, while the musicians redoubled their efforts, and the old maniac in the corner gave forth his chuckling cry with greater force, and swayed his trembling body more vehemently to and fro. The snake, suddenly brought from the darkness of the kennel to the light of day, was torpid and weary. It drooped between the charmer's hands. He shook it, called on it, caught up a stick and struck it. Then, forcing its mouth wide open, he barred its pink throat with the stick, on which he made it fix its two fangs, which were like two sharp hooks. Holding the end of the stick, he came again to Claire, to whom his whole performance was now exclusively devoted; and, bringing the hanging reptile close to her eyes, he jumped it up and down to the sound of the drum and pipe.

"You see," Claire said to Renfrew, "the roof of its mouth is flesh-colour."

He did not answer. Why did all this mean so much to him? Why did the clouds grow darker? The music and the cries of the old maniac perturbed him and bewildered his brain. And he wanted to be calm, and to watch Claire and this savage with a cool and undivided attention. By this time the snake was growing irritated. It agitated its long body furiously; and when the charmer unhooked its fangs from the stick, it turned its head toward him and made a sudden dart at his face. He opened his mouth wide, thrust the snake into it, and let the creature fasten on his tongue, from which blood began to flow. Still bleeding, and with the snake fixed on his tongue, he danced and sprang into the air. His eyes grew wild. Foam ran from his mouth, and his whole appearance became demoniacal. Yet his eyes still fastened themselves upon Claire. In his most frantic moments his attention was never entirely distracted from the spot where she was standing. He tore the snake from his tongue and buried its fangs in the flesh of his left wrist. Cries broke from the crowd. The sight of the blood had excited them, for these people love blood as the toper loves wine. They urged the charmer on to fresh exertions with furious screams of encouragement. The maniac bent his body like a dervish in the last exercises of his religion, and the ragged musicians forced a

more extreme uproar from their instruments. The charmer caught the snake by the tail, and strove to pull it backwards off his wrist. But the reptile's fangs were firmly fastened. It held on with a terrible tenacity, and a struggle ensued between it and its master. When at length it gave way, it was streaked with blood and now at last thoroughly aroused. The charmer scraped his tongue with a straw; then, casting himself again upon the earth, he prayed once more with fury to Sidi Mahomet. Claire watched him always, with that pale and exquisite attention which one genius gives to the performance of another. Her face was white and still. Her body never moved. But her eyes blazed with life, and with the fires of a violent soul completely awake. Having finished his prayer, which ended in a cry so poignant that it might have burst from the lips of that world on which the flood came, the charmer remained upon the ground in a sitting posture, laid the snake in his lap, and drew from the inside of his ragged robe a Moorish lute made of a bladder, bamboo, and two strings, and coloured a pale yellowish-green. He plucked the strings gently, and played the fragment of a wild tune. Then, suddenly catching up the snake, and thrusting his tongue far out of his mouth, he poised the snake upon it, rose to his feet and stood at his full height in front of Claire, fix-

ing his eyes upon her with a glance that seemed to claim from her both wonder and worship. The snake reared itself up higher and higher upon the quivering tongue; and the charmer, extending his long arms, whirled slowly round as if poised upon a movable platform, while a terrific clamour broke from the Moors, who seemed to be roused by this feat to the highest pitch of excitement. Still turning and turning, the charmer drew from his bosom a second snake that was black and larger than the first, and coiled it round his sinewy neck like a gigantic necklace, the darting head in front, resting, a sort of monstrous pendant, upon his uncovered chest. To Renfrew he looked like some hateful grotesque in a nightmare, inhuman, endowed with attributes of a devil. The serpents were part of him, growths of his body, visible signs of some terrible disease in which he gloried and of which he made a show. The creature was intolerable. His exhibition had suddenly become to Renfrew unfit for the eyes of any woman; and, without a word, he took hold of Claire and pulled her almost violently away from the circle on which the fascinated mob was beginning to encroach. She resisted him.

"Desmond!" she exclaimed, "what are you doing?"

"Claire—come. I insist upon it!"

Already the Moors had thronged the place

which they had left vacant. She turned a white face on him. There was in her eyes the hideous expression of a sleep-walker suddenly awakened, and she trembled in every limb. She swung round from Renfrew, and, above the intercepting Moors, high in the air, she saw the snake, which seemed climbing to heaven. While she looked, a huge hand closed upon it and took it out of sight. The charmer, observing the departure of his distinguished patrons, had abruptly stopped his performance. Claire made no further resistance. Without a word, she permitted Renfrew to lead her to the horses and help her into the saddle. They rode down the hill to the camp without exchanging a word.

When Claire had dismounted, she stood for a moment twisting her whip in her hands. Then she said:

"Desmond, I must ask you never to startle me again as you did today, by sudden action. You can't understand how such an interruption hurts a nature like mine. I would rather you had struck me. That would only have wounded my body."

She turned and went into her tent, leaving Renfrew in an agony of penitence and self-reproach. All the rest of the afternoon she was very cold and silent, rather dreamy than sullen, but obviously disinclined for conversa-

tion, and still more obviously unwilling to endure even the slightest demonstration of affection on the part of Renfrew. When the sheep which were to be slaughtered for the soldiers' feast were driven bleating into the camp, she retired into her tent, and remained there, resting, until the sun was low in the heavens, and the porters and mule-drivers went gaily out to search for the materials of the African fire with which the night was to be celebrated. They returned, singing the Moorish conquest of Granada, with their strong arms full of canes, dry and brittle branches of trees, logs that looked like whole trunks, and huge shrubs, green and sweet-smelling. Hearing their song, Claire came out of her tent. The sky was red, and, in the southwest, turrets of vapour rose and streamed out, assuming mysterious and thin shapes in the gathering dimness. A great flock of birds, flying very high and performing a definite and beautiful pattern, passed slowly on the wing towards the kingdom of the storks that lies near the sand-banks of Ceuta. They moved in silence, and faded away in the twilight stealthily, like things full of quiet intention and governed by some furtive, but inexorable, desire. Renfrew, who was wandering rather miserably near the camp, watching descending pilgrims from the city melt into the vast bosom of the plain, saw Claire's white

figure in the tent door, half hidden in a soft rosy mist which stole from the lips of evening as scent steals from the lips of a flower. He felt afraid to go to her. He possessed her; and yet it seemed to him now that he scarcely knew her. He was only an ordinary man. She was a strange woman; not merely because of her womanhood, as all women are to all men, but strange in that which lay beyond and beneath her womanhood, in her genius, and in the dull or ardent moods that stood round it, one, and yet not one, with it. In the tent door she leaned like a spirit born of the evening, a child of fading things, dying lights, fainting colours, retreating sounds—a spirit waiting for the coming of the stars, and the rising of the moon, and the mysteries of the night, and the subtle odours that the winds of northern Africa bring with them over the mountains and down the lonely valleys, when the sun descends. And as a spirit may listen to the songs of men, with the melancholy of a thing apart, she listened to the songs of the Moors, until at length they seemed to be in her own heart that evening, as if they were songs of her own country. And these dark men with wild eyes who sang them, while they flung upon the grass their burdens from the thickets, and from the hedgeless and wide fields, were no longer alien to her. She stood in the tent door, and, without any

conscious effort of the imagination, became their fancied mate—a woman sprung from the same soil, or come in—like the strange people—from the deserts of their country. Only she was not as one of their women, mindless, patient, and concealed; but as their women should be, strong, hot-blooded, brave, serene, and looked upon by a world without reproach.

Absalem came up to her to tell her some details of the night's festivity. Before he spoke she said to him:

"Where does the desert lie?"

He told her.

"Does the miracle man come from there?"

Absalem answered that no one knew. He had been much in Wasan, the sacred city of Morocco; but none knew his birthplace, his tribe, his name. Often he disappeared, no man could tell whither. But, doubtless, he made vast journeys. Some said that he had exhibited his snakes on the banks of the Nile, that he had gone with the pilgrim trains to Mecca, that he knew Khartum as he knew Marakesh, and that he never ceased from wandering.

"What is his age?" Claire asked.

Absalem answered that he must be old, but that Time had no power over him.

"He miracle man; he live long as he wish."

Last she asked when he would leave Tetuan.

"Perhaps this night. Perhaps tomorrow night, perhaps never. Perhaps he go already."

"Already!"

Suddenly Claire moved out from the tent and joined Renfrew, who was still watching her and weaving lover's fancies about her white figure.

"Have you been here long, Desmond?" she asked.

"Very long, dearest. Are you rested?"

"Quite. From here you can see all the people travelling away from the city towards the sea?"

"Yes."

"Have you been watching them?"

"Yes, indeed; for half the afternoon."

She turned her great eyes on him searchingly, and seemed as if she checked a question which was almost on her lips.

"They must have been a strange multitude," she said at length. "I wonder where they are all going?"

"Some to the villages in the plain, some to the coast. I saw the Riffs who were in the Soko pass by. I suppose they were returning to the caverns from which they plunder becalmed vessels, Spanish and Portuguese."

"The Riffs—yes?"

Her intonation suggested that she was wait-

ing for some further information. Renfrew's curiosity was aroused.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked. "What do you want to know?"

"Nothing, Desmond. How dark it is getting! There is Mohammed ringing the bell. And look, those must be the soldiers. They are just marching in from the city."

With the coming of night a wind arose, blowing towards the sea from the mountains; and with it came up a troop of clouds which blotted out stars and moon, and plunged the plain into a gulf of darkness. Tetuan does not gleam with lamps at night like a European city, and all the distant villas of the Moors were closely shuttered. So the wind, warm and scented and strong, swept over a black land, deserted and vacant. Only in the camp was there movement, music, and an illumination that strove up in the night, as if it would climb to the clouds. Scarcely had Claire and Renfrew finished dinner, when Absalem and Mohammed ceremoniously appeared to conduct them out to the bare space before the tents on which the African fire had been carefully built. Absalem carried a lamp which swung in the wind, and, behind, there appeared from the kitchen tent some of the porters, bearing burning brands, the flames of which were at right angles to the wood from which

they sprung. The guard of soldiers, one dozen in all, armed with immense guns and wrapped in hooded cloaks, were already crouched in a silent mass before the lifeless and portentous erection which came out of the darkness, as Absalem swung forward the lamp, like the skeleton of a monster. They turned their shadowy faces on Claire, and stared with eyes intent and unself-conscious as those of an animal. The porters flung their brands upon the mountain of twigs, and instantaneously a huge sheet of vivid gold sprang up against the black background of the night, as if it had been shaken out on the wind by invisible hands. This sheet expanded, swayed, fluttered in ragged edges, and cast forth a cloud of sparks which were carried away into the air and vanished in the sky. The shrubs caught fire and crackled furiously, and finally the foundation of gigantic logs began to glow steadily and to fill the wind with a scorching heat. The camp was gradually defined, at first vaguely and in sections—the peak of a tent, the head of a mule, a startled pariah dog, a Moor set in the eye of the flames; then clearly, as the buildings one may see in a furnace, complete and glowing. The faces of the soldiers were barred with flickering orange, and red lights played in their huge and staring eyeballs. The horses and mules could be counted. Be-

fore the kitchen tent the sacrifice of sheep was visible, stewing in enormous pans upon red embers in a trench of earth. And the grave cook, who was distinguished by a white turban, shone like a pantomime magician at the mouth of an enchanted cave. Warmth, light, life poured upon the night, and the voices of men began to mingle with the continuous voice of this superb fire. The Moors, soldiers, servants, porters, kindled into furious gaiety with the swiftness of the canes and olive boughs. They sprang up from the ground, pulled the shrouding hoods from their faces, tossed away their *djelabs,* and began, with shouts and ejaculations, to dance up and down before the golden sheet, spreading their hands to it with the glee of children. A sudden joy beamed in the dusky and solemn faces, twinkled in the sombre eyes. One man flung away his fez, another dashed his turban to the ground. Round, shaven heads, bare arms, brown legs, half concealed by fluttering linen knickerbockers, lithe bodies emerged with eager haste into the light. Shadows became abruptly men, formless humps athletes. Mutes sent out great voices to startle the sweeping bats. Mourners turned into maniacs. It was a fantasia that exploded into life like a rocket, shedding a stream of vivid human fire. Mohammed drew away from the flames, taking a dozen swift footsteps to the rear.

Then, with a shout, he dashed forward, bounded into the golden sheet, and disappeared as a clown disappears through a paper hoop. Only the paper closed up behind him. He leaped through light to darkness, pursued by a thousand eager sparks. One soldier followed him, then another, and another. The porters, linking hands, leaped in twos and threes. Even the cook, old, and serious with a weight of savoury knowledge, tottered to the edge of the fire, which was now becoming a furnace, and took it as an Irish horse takes a stone wall, striking the topmost branches with his bare feet amid a chorus of yells.

Claire watched the darting figures with a silent gravity. She did not seem to be stirred by the fantasia of the firelight, or to catch any gaiety or life from the boisterous activity of those about her. The flames lit up the whiteness of her face and showed Renfrew that she was looking gloomy and even despairing.

"Is anything the matter, Claire?" he asked anxiously.

"No. How could there be?"

The wind, which was increasing in violence, blew her thin dress forward, and she shivered. Absalem noticed it.

"Wear *djelab*, lady," he said.

And in a moment he had taken his off, and

was carefully wrapping Claire in it. She seemed glad of it, thanked him, and, with a quick gesture that hurt Renfrew, pulled the big brown hood up over her head, so that her face was entirely concealed from view. She now looked exactly like a Moor, and might have been mistaken for one of the soldiers before the fire was lit and all impeding garments were thrown aside.

Renfrew, uneasy, and wondering what conduct on his part would best suit her mysterious mood, after one or two remarks to which she barely replied, drew away a little, and gave his attention to the antics of the soldiers. Some of them were already resuming their *djelabs,* in preparation for the feast, which they sniffed even through the odour of burning wood and leaves. The cook, after his emotional and acrobatic outburst, had returned to his pans, which he was stirring tenderly with a stick. When Renfrew again looked towards Claire, he found it impossible to tell which cloak shrouded her from his sight. Four or five hooded figures stood near the fire. She must be one of them. He approached the group, but found, to his surprise, that all the members of it were soldiers. Claire had moved away. Renfrew stood for a few minutes with the men, till they were summoned to their feast, which, strangely enough, was to take

place away from the fire in the dense darkness behind the tents. Then he was left alone by the huge mass of flame, which roared hoarsely in the wind. Where could Claire be? On any ordinary occasion Renfrew would certainly have sought for her, but tonight something held him back. He knew very well that she wished to be alone, that something was closely occupying her mind. Whether she was still brooding over the event of the afternoon, when he had forcibly led her away in the very crisis of the snake-charmer's performance, he could not tell. To an ordinary woman such a matter would have been a trifle; but Renfrew understood that Claire felt it more deeply. Her mind appeared to be mysteriously moved and awakened by this savage from the depths of Morocco. Various circumstances combined to render him more interesting to her than he could possibly be to any ordinary traveller. Renfrew recognised that fully and quietly. The genius of Claire had enabled her to realise in London all the wildly picturesque idiosyncrasies of a man whom she had never seen or heard of. Suddenly fate had led her to him, and she had beheld her own performance, the original of her imitation. As Renfrew stood by the fire, he began to feel the folly of his proceeding of the afternoon, and to imagine more clearly than before the condition into

which it had thrown Claire. It is a sin to disturb the contemplations of genius. It is sacrilege. And then Renfrew had been moved to his act by a preposterous access of jealousy. He acknowledged this to himself. He had been jealous of Claire's interest in this man's performance, jealous perhaps even of her dream among the hills in the midnight camp, where the man stood before her sleeping eyes, and played with his visionary serpent. How mad can a lover be? He resolved to go to Claire, and ask her pardon. This resolve thrilled him. To carry it out, he would have to draw very near to Claire, to unpack his heart to her. After all, she had given herself to him. But he had appreciated the wonder of his rôle as possessor so keenly that he had waited upon her moods with an almost trembling awe. Now, in asking pardon, he would show that in his passion he could be strong. Women want to see the man in the lover, as well as the devotee. Renfrew, in acknowledging his jealousy of a black savage, meant to clasp Claire with the arms of a whirlwind.

Meanwhile she was hidden from him. The wind blew strongly. The sparks leaped away in clouds toward the sea. From the dense darkness behind him came a sound of music. The soldiers were feasting. The porters were striking the lute, and singing songs of the dance

and of love and of victory. It was a night of comradeship and of rejoicing. Yet he stood alone; and the turmoil of his heart was unheeded. He tried to explore with his eyes the blackness of the night which stood round the golden fire. Claire must be in that blackness close to him. Doubtless she saw him, a red and yellow creature, painted into fictitious brilliance by the illumination which was shed upon him. She saw him and kept from him. Renfrew resolved to be patient. When her mood of reserve died she would come to him, in her dress of a Moor, and he would kiss the white face beneath the hood, and put his arms round the thin figure that was lost in the *djelab* of brawny Absalem, and tell her the true story of his heart, never fully told to her yet. He squatted down before the fire, lit his pipe, shrugged his shoulders against the tempest from the mountains, and waited, listening to the weird music that swept by him like a hidden bird on the wind.

And Claire—where was she? When Absalem wrapped her in the huge *djelab* it seemed to Claire that he had divined her secret longing to be in hiding. She disappeared into the mighty hood of the garment as into a cave. Its shadow concealed her from the watching eyes of Renfrew. There was warmth in it and a beautiful darkness. She desired both. She saw

Renfrew turn to watch the leaping soldiers, and stole away out of the illuminated circle formed by the glow from the fire, into the night beyond. She did not go far, only into the nearest shadow. And there she sat down on the short dry grass, and forgot Renfrew, the roaring flames, the wind that felt incessantly at her robe, the shouting guard, the radiant and dancing attendants. She forgot them all as completely as if they had never been in her life; for the strangeness of certain incidents preoccupied her, to the exclusion of everything else. In the double existence of a really great actress there are many moments in which the truths of the imagination seem more important than the truths of physical phenomena of things seen by the eye, of sounds received and appreciated by the ear. In these moments, genius usurps the throne of reason, and the mind beholds fancies as sunlit gods, facts as timid and scarcely defined shadows. So it was with Claire now. Even the snake-charmer, as he gave his performance in the Soko, was a shadow in comparison with that man who summoned her to the tent door in the solitary encampment. And behind and beyond both these figures of truth and dreaming stood a third, created for herself by Claire in London, that figure into whom she had poured her soul as into a mould, when she charmed imaginary serpents, and prayed to the

god in whom, for a moment, she believed with the passion of the perfect mime. This trio Claire placed in line, and reviewed: charmer of her imagination, of her dream, of the Soko.

They were the same, and yet not the same. For the first was dominated, even was created by her. The second stood above her, like some magician, and summoned her as one possessing a right. The third—what of him? He was a wild creature of blood and foam, crafty, a player like herself, a maker of money, a savage in sacking, and almost nothing to her now. Out of the desert he came. Into the desert he was, perhaps, even now, returning, with his snakes sleeping in his bosom, and the money of the Tetuan Moors jingling in his pouch.

Yes, she saw him, travelling like a shadow in the night, one of those grotesques which leap on bedroom walls when a lamp flares in the wind that sighs through an open casement. He was going; but the man of the dream remained. The dream man had come up out of the world that is vaguer to us than the desert when we wake, and clearer to us than the desert when we sleep. Claire saw him still, and, while the wonderful mountebank of the Soko passed, he stood in the tent door like a statue of ebony, a rooted reality. And the snake was in his bosom; and the pipe was at his lips; and the power was in his heart. And as he played,

Claire thought beneath the *djelab* of Absalem, there came to him, with the faltering steps of a thing irresistibly charmed, that third man whose soul she had seen in London, like approaching like, with the manner of a slave and the glance of the conquered. And her soul was still within that charmed figure. She could not rescue it now from the place where she had put it. And the statue at the tent door played the irresistible melody until his wild and cringing double stole to his very feet, and nearer and nearer, till they melted together, and where two men had been, there was only one. He smiled with a subtle triumph, laid down his pipe, stretched out his arms and vanished. But within him now was the soul of Claire, borne wherever he should go, his captive, his possession for all eternity.

Behind her, in the cloudy darkness, Claire heard a movement, and the gliding of soft feet on grass. She did not turn her head, supposing that one of the soldiers was keeping his guard. The movement ceased. But the little noise had broken the thread on which her fancies were strung. They were scattered like beads. She found herself feeling quite ordinary, and listening with an urging attention for a renewal of the trifling noise behind her. In the distance she could see Renfrew, now crouching before the fire, which poured colour and a piercing

vitality upon him. She heard also, and for the first time, the sound of the porters' music, which had been audible in the night all through her reverie, though she was entirely unaware of the fact. She realised that the soldiers were devouring the stew of mutton, and that she was in a gay camp, full of human beings in a state of unusual satisfaction. One of these human beings must be close to her. She turned her head. But she was sitting in the darkness beyond the illumination of the fire, and beyond her the night was like a black wall. Whatever had moved there was invisible to her. She had not heard the gliding step go away, and she felt that she was not alone. This feeling began to render her uneasy. She got up, with the intention of returning to the firelight and to Renfrew. Indeed she had taken a step or two in his direction, when she was checked by an unreasonable desire to see who had come so close to her, who had broken her reverie. Acting upon the sudden impulse, she turned swiftly and came on into the darkness. Almost instantly she stood before the dim outline of a man, and paused. Here in the night it was very lonely, even though the illuminated camp was so near. Claire hesitated to approach this man who seemed to be on watch and who was perfectly motionless. She waited a moment, wishing that he would come to her in

order that she might see what he was like, whether he carried a gun and was a soldier. But it was soon evident that he did not mean to move. Then Claire went up so close to him that his coarse garment rubbed against her *djelab* and his eyes stared right down into hers. And she saw that it was the snake-charmer from the Soko, who was looking into her face with the very smile of the man in her dream. Round his bare throat one of his snakes was twined, and he held its neck between the fingers of his left hand. The wind tossed his short and ragged cloak wildly to and fro, and whirled the long lock of hair at the back of his shaven head about, and made it dance like a living thing. When Claire came up to him, he never said a word, or moved at all. It seemed to her that his face was that of some dark and triumphant being, waiting immovably for something that was certain to come to him, and to come so close that he need not even stretch out his hand to take it as his possession. What was the thing he waited for? She looked at his black face and at the snake which moved slowly, trying to thrust its way downward into the warmth of his bosom, out of the reach of the wind and of the night. And, when the man's fingers unclosed to release it, and it slid away and softly disappeared beneath his garment, Claire shuddered under the

influence of a sensation that was surely mad. For she felt that she envied the snake, and that the charmer was waiting there in the darkness for her. As the snake vanished, Claire recoiled towards the fire. The charmer did not attempt to follow her, and his huge and watchful figure quickly faded from Claire's eyes till his blackness had become one with the blackness of the night.

IV

Renfrew, as he crouched before the fire, felt a light touch on his shoulder. He looked up, saw Claire's white face peering down on him, and sprang to his feet.

"I thought you were never coming, that you had deserted me altogether, and left me lonely in the midst of the fantasia," he cried, seizing her hands.

"I am cold," she said; "horribly cold. Let me sit beside you, close to the fire."

She sat down on the ground, almost touching the roaring flames.

"Where have you been?"

"Sitting in the dark. The soldiers are feasting?"

"Yes, and the camp fellows are all singing and playing. Don't you hear them? We are quite alone. That's all I want, all I care for.

Claire, when you go away like this, and leave me, even for a few minutes, Morocco is the most desolate place in all the world, and I'm the most desolate vagabond in it."

He put his arm round her. The terrific glow from the fire played over her face, danced in the deep folds of her *djelab,* shone in her eyes, showered a cloud of gold and red about her hair. For she had let her hood fall down on her shoulders. She attained to that fine and almost demoniacal picturesqueness which glorifies even the most commonplace smith when you see him in his forge by night. Her cheeks were suffused with scarlet, as if she had suddenly painted them to go on the stage. Yet she shivered again as Renfrew spoke.

"You should not have left the fire," he said. "And yet the wind is warm."

"It can't be. But it's not the wind, it's the darkness that has chilled me."

"Or is it the loneliness?" he asked, tenderly. "For you have been alone as well as I, and nothing on earth makes one so cold as solitude."

"I scarcely ever feel alone, Desmond," she said.

And, as she spoke, she cast a glance behind her into the darkness from which she had just come. Renfrew noticed it.

"You have been alone?" he asked hastily.

Then he checked himself with an ashamed laugh.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed.

He clasped her more closely.

"A fool, because I'm so desperately in love with you, Claire," he said, rushing on his confession with the swiftness of alarmed bravery. "Look here, I want to tell you something. You must put everything I do, everything I am, down to the account of my love—shyness, anger, abruptness, violence—everything, Claire. My love's responsible. It does play the devil with an ordinary man when he's given his very soul to—to a woman like you, to a great woman. It keeps him back when he ought to go on, and sends him on when he ought to stay quiet, and makes him jealous of stones and—and savages."

"Savages, Desmond?"

Renfrew's face was scarlet. He put up his hand before it and muttered:

"This fire's scorching. Yes, Claire, of savages. Didn't you find that out this afternoon, when we were in Tetuan? But of course you couldn't. You couldn't know you'd married such an infernal lunatic."

He broke off. She was watching him with a close attention, and her body had ceased to tremble under his arm.

"Go on, Desmond."

"You want me to tell you the sort of man you've married?"

"I want you to tell me what you mean."

"Then I will. Claire, this afternoon I took you away from that snake-charming chap because—well, because you watched him as if he fascinated you."

"Oh!"

"Of course I knew why. His performance was clever, and he was picturesque in his way, although, to be sure, it was all put on, as far as that goes."

"Like my stage performances, Desmond."

"Claire," he said hotly. "How can you!"

"That man acts far better than I do—if he acts at all."

"Was that why he interested you so much?"

"In what other way could he interest me?"

Renfrew kicked at one of the blazing logs and sent up a shower of red-hot flakes.

"Well, there was your dream, Claire."

"Yes, there was that."

"It was curious, coming just before we saw the fellow. And you say the two men were alike."

"I did not say alike. I said the same."

"How could that be?"

"How can a thousand things be? Yet we cannot deny them when they are, any more than we can deny that we feel an earthly immortality

within us and yet crumble into dust. In sleep I saw that man. I saw his snake. I heard him play."

"Yes, Claire, I know. It's very strange."

Renfrew's forehead was wrinkled in a meditative frown.

"But, after all, what's a dream?" he exclaimed. "A vagary of a sleeping brain. And in your dream you wouldn't go to that beggar, Claire."

"No. I wouldn't go, and so I died."

"It all means nothing—nothing at all."

She looked at him gravely.

"I wonder whether there are things in life that we are compelled to do, Desmond," she said. "I sometimes think there must be. How otherwise can a thousand strange events be accounted for, especially things that women do?"

"I don't know," he muttered, staring at her anxiously in the firelight.

"Everyone acknowledges the irresistible power of physical force over physical weakness. Some day, perhaps, when the world has grown a little older, we shall all understand that the power of mental force is precisely similar, and can as little be resisted. What's that?"

Renfrew felt that she was suddenly alert. Her thin form grew hard and quivering, like

the body of a greyhound about to be let loose on a hare. He heard nothing except a sound of music from the darkness, and the gentle rustle of the wind.

"I hear nothing," he said. "What was it—a cry?"

"No, no!"

"What then?"

"Oh, Desmond—hush!"

He was obedient, and strained his ears, wondering what Claire had heard. The fire was at last beginning to die down, for the flames had devoured the masses of dry twigs and had now nothing to feed upon except the heavy logs. So the darkness drew a little closer round the camp, as if the night expanded noiselessly. One of the porters, or, perhaps, one of the soldiers, was playing a queer little air upon a pipe over and over again. It was plaintive and very soft. But the tone of the instrument was strangely penetrating, and the wind carried it along over the plain, as if anxious to bear it to the sea, that the cave men might hear it, and the sailors bearing up for the Spanish coast. Was Claire listening to this odd little tune? Renfrew wondered. There seemed no other sound. She was moving uneasily now, as if an intense restlessness had taken hold of her. And she turned her head away from him and gazed into the night.

Presently she put her hand on Renfrew's arm, which was still round her waist, and tried to remove it. But he would not yield to her desire. He only held her closer, and again—he could not tell why—the smouldering jealousy began to flare up in his heart.

"No, Claire," he said, in answer to her movement, "you are mine. You have given yourself to me. I alone have the right to keep you, to hold you close—close to my heart."

"Can you keep me always, Desmond?" she said, suddenly turning on him with a sort of fierce excitement.

She looked into his eyes as if she would search the very depths of his soul for strength, for power.

"You have the right. Yes; but that is nothing—nothing."

"Nothing, Claire?"

"You must have the strength, Desmond. That is everything."

There was a look almost of despair in her face. She threw herself against him as if moved by a sudden yearning for protection, and put her arms round his shoulders.

The hidden Moor was still playing the same monotonous little tune, an African aria, as wild as a bird that flies over the desert, or a cloud that is driven across the sky above a dangerous sea. It was imaginative, and, as all tunes seem

to have a shape, this melody was misshapen and yet delicious, like a twisted tangled creature that has the smile of a sweet woman, or the eyes of an alluring child. In its plaintiveness there was the atmosphere of solitary places. And there was a sound of love in it, too, but of a love so uncivilised as to be almost monstrous. Some earth man of a dead age might have sung it to his mate in a land where the sun looked down on things primeval. It might have caught the heart of maidens very long ago, before they learned to think of passion as the twin of law, and to regard a kiss as the seal set upon the tape of matrimony. The queer sorrow of it could hardly have moved any eyes to tears. Yet few women could have heard it without a sense of desolation. It ran through the darkness as cold water runs in the black shadow of a forest, a trickle of sound as thin and persistent as the cry of a wild creature in the night.

Renfrew thrilled under the touch of Claire's hand.

"You can give me the strength every woman seeks in the man she yields herself up to," he said.

"How?"

"By loving me."

"Ah, yes. But the strength must not come, however subtly, from the woman. No—no."

Again she leaned away from him, with her face turned towards the darkness. Tremors ran through her, and her hands dropped almost feebly from Renfrew's shoulders, as the hands of an invalid fall away, and down, after an embrace.

"Oh, no," she reiterated, and her voice was almost a wail. "It must be there, in the man, part of him, whether he is with the woman in the night, or alone—far off—in the jungle, or in the—the desert. He must have the strange strength that comes from solitude. Where can the men of our country find that now?"

"They find strength in the clash of wills, Claire, and in the battles of love."

"Most of them never find it at all," she said, with a sort of sullen resignation. "And most of the women do not want it, or ask for it, or know what it is. The danger is when some accident or some fate teaches them what it is. Then—then——"

She stopped, and glanced at Renfrew suspiciously, as if she had so nearly betrayed a secret that he might, nay, must have guessed it.

"What do you mean? Then they seek it away from——?"

"Where they know they will find it," she said, almost defiantly.

Renfrew's face grew cold and rigid.

"What are you saying to me, Claire?"

"What is true of some women, Desmond."

He was silent. Pain and fear invaded his heart; and, by degrees, the little tune played by the Moor seemed to approach him, very quietly, and to become one with this slow agony. Music, among its many and terrible powers, numbers one that is scarcely possessed as forcibly by any other art. It can glide into a man and direct his emotions as irresistibly as science can direct the flow of a stream. It can penetrate as a thing seen cannot penetrate. For that which is invisible is that which is invincible. And this tune of the Moor, while it added to Renfrew's distress, touched his distress with confusion and bewilderment. At first he did not realise that the music had anything to do with his state of mind, or with the growing turmoil of his heart and brain; but he felt that something was becoming intolerable to him, and pushing him on in a dangerous path. He thought it was the statement of Claire; and, for the first time in his life, he was stirred by an anger against her that was horrible to him. He released her from his arm.

"How dare you say that to me?" he asked. "Do you understand what your words imply, that—good God—that women are like animals, creatures without souls, running to the feet of the master who has the whip with the longest, the most stinging lash? Why, such a

creed as yours would keep men savages, and kill all gentleness out of the world. Curse that chap! That hideous music of his——"

He had suddenly become aware that the Moor's melody added something to his torment. At his last exclamation, the sullen look in Claire's pale face gave way to an expression of fear and of startling solicitude.

"Desmond, you are putting a wrong interpretation on what I said," she began hastily.

But he was excited, and could not endure any interruption.

"And you imply a degrading immorality as a prevailing characteristic of women too," he went on—"that they should leave their homes, deny their obligations, because they find elsewhere—away, out in some dark place with a blackguard—a powerful will to curb them and keep them down, like—why, like these wretched women all round us here in this country—the women we saw in Tetuan only today, veiled, hidden, loaded with burdens, worse off than animals, because their masters doubt them and would not dream of trusting them. Claire, there's something barbarous about you."

He spoke the words with the intonation of one who thinks he is uttering an insult. But she smiled.

"It's the something barbarous about me that has placed me where I am," she said, with a

cold pride. "It is that which civilisation worships in me, that which has set me above the other women of my time. It is even that which has made you love me, Desmond, whether you know it or not."

He looked at her like a man half dazed.

"I frighten the dove-cotes. I can make men tremble by my outbursts of passion, and women faint because I am sad; and even the stony-hearted sob when I die. And I can make you love me, Desmond. Yes, perhaps I am more barbarous than other women. But do you think I am sorry for it? No."

"Some day you may be, Claire."

He spoke more gently. The wonder and worship he had for this woman stirred in him again. While she had been speaking, she had instinctively risen to her feet, and she stood in the dull red glow of the waning fire, looking down at him as if he were a creature in a lower world than the one in which she could walk at will.

"I shall never choose to be sorry," she said, "whatever my fate may be. To be sorry is to be feeble, and to be feeble is to be unfit to live, and unfit to die. Never, never think of me as being sorry for anything I have done, or may do. Never deceive yourself about me."

A great log, eaten through by a flame at its heart, broke gently asunder on the summit of

the heaped wood. One half of it, red-hot, and alive with multitudes of flickering fires, gold, primrose, steel-blue, and deep purple, dropped and fell at Claire's feet. She glanced down at it, and at Renfrew.

"My deeds may burn me up," she said, "as those coloured fires burn up that wood, until it is no longer wood but fire itself. They shall never drench me with wretched, contemptible tears."

He got up; and, when he was on his feet, he seemed to hear the incessant music more clearly, blending with the words of Claire. The notes were like hot sparks falling on him. He winced under them, and looked round almost wildly. Then, without speaking, he hurried away in the darkness to the place where the soldiers were feasting, and the men of the camp were holding their fantasia. Claire divined why he went. She started to step forward as if to try to stop him; but his movement had been so abrupt that she was too late. She had to let him go. Her hands fell at her sides, and she waited by the dying fire in the attitude of one who listens intently. The soft melody of that hidden and persistent musician wailed in her ears, on and on. It came again and again, never ceasing, never altering in time. And its influence upon Claire was terrible as the influence of the dream music in the valley beneath the Kasba. She

longed to go to it. She seemed to belong to it—to be its possession—and to have erred when she separated herself from it. In the darkness it was awaiting her, and it sent out its crying voice in the night as a message, as a summons soft, clear, and quietly determined. She clenched her hands as she stood by the fire. She strove to root her feet in the ground. If there had been anything to cling to just then, she would have stretched forth her arms and clung to it, resisting what she loved from fear of the future. But there was nothing. And she thought of the children and of the Pied Piper. But they were legendary beings of a fable long ago. And she thought of Renfrew and of his love. But that seemed nothing. That could not keep her. He was a pale phantom, and her career was a handful of dust, and her name was as the name graven upon a tomb, and her life was but as a gift to be offered to an unknown destiny—while that melody called to her. Had any one seen her then in the glow of the firelight, she would have seemed to him terrible. For suddenly she let the *djelab* of Absalem slip from her shoulders to the ground. And, in the fiercely flickering light, that makes all things and people assume unearthly aspects, her thin figure in its white robe looked like the white body of a serpent, erect and trembling, under the influence

of the charmer. But the melody grew softer and softer, more faint, more dreamy in the darkness. Presently it ceased. As it did so, Claire drew a deep breath, lifted her head like one released from a thraldom, and turned her face towards the camp.

Almost directly she saw Renfrew returning towards her. He looked puzzled.

"It wasn't any of the men playing," he said to her.

"No?"

Claire bent, caught up the *djelab* and drew it over her.

"I went to them, and found them listening to some story Absalem was telling. They were all gathered close round him, huddled up together in the dark. And the piping came from quite another direction—not from the soldiers either. It must have been some vagabond out of Tetuan. I was just going to make a search for him, when the noise stopped. He must have heard me coming."

He still looked disturbed and angry, and this break in their conversation was final. It seemed impossible to take up the thread of it again. They stood together watching the fire fade away till it was a faint glow almost level with the ground. Then at last Renfrew spoke, in a voice that was almost timid.

"Claire," he said.

"Yes," she answered out of the dull twilight that would soon be darkness.

"If I have said anything tonight to hurt you, don't think of it, don't remember it. I don't know—I don't seem to have been like myself tonight. I believe that cursed music irritated me, so ugly, and so monotonous; it got right on my nerves, I think."

"Did it?"

"Without my knowing it."

He felt for one of her hands and clasped it.

"Yes, dear. We both said more than we meant. Didn't we?"

Claire did not assent; but she let her hand lie in his. That satisfied him then, although afterwards he remembered her silence. Soon the fire was dead; and they said good night in the wind, which seemed colder because there was no more light.

. . . . . .

Renfrew went to his tent, undressed, and got into bed. The wind roared against the canvas. But the pegs had been driven stoutly into the ground by the porters, and held the cords fast. He felt very tired and depressed, and thought he would not fall asleep quickly. But he soon began to be drowsy, and to have a sense of dropping into the very arms of the tempest, lulled by its noise. He slept for a time. Presently, however, and while it was still quite

dark, he woke up. He heard the wind as before, but was troubled by an idea that some other sound was mingling with it, some murmur so indistinct that he could not decide what it was, although he was aware of it. He sat up and strained his ears, and wished the wind would lull, if only for a moment, or that this other sound—which had surely been the cause of his waking—would increase, and stand out distinctly in the night. And, at last, by dint of listening with all his force, Renfrew seemed to himself to compel the sound to greater clearness. Then he knew that somewhere, far off perhaps in the wind, the player on the pipe reiterated his soft and stealthy music. It was swept on the tempest like a drowning thing caught in a whirlpool. It was so faint as to be almost inaudible. But in all its weakness it retained most completely its character, and made the same impression upon Renfrew as when it was near and distinct. It irritated and it repelled him. And, with an angry exclamation, he flung himself down and buried his head in the pillow, stopping his ears with his hands.

. . . . . .

With daylight the camp was in a turmoil. Claire was gone. Her bed had not been slept in. She had not undressed. She had not even taken off Absalem's *djelab*. At least it could not be found. Renfrew, frantic, almost mad

with anxiety, explored the plain, rode at a gallop to the gate of the city, called upon the Governor of Tetuan to help him in his search, and summoned the Consul to his aid in his despair. Every effort was made to find the missing woman; but no success crowned the quest, either at that time, or afterwards, when weeks became months, and months grew into years. A great actress was lost to the world. His world was lost to Renfrew. He rode back at last one day to the villas of Tangier, bent down upon his horse, broken, alone. In his despair he cursed himself. He accused himself of cruelty to Claire that night beside the African fire, when he had been roused to a momentary anger against her. He even told himself that he had driven her away from him. But other men, who had known Claire and the strangeness of her caprices, said to each other that she had got tired of Renfrew and given him the slip, wandering away disguised in the *djelab* of a Moor, and that some fine day she would turn up again and reappear upon the stage that had seen her glory.

Later on, when Renfrew at last, after long searching, came hopelessly back to England, so changed that his friends scarcely recognised him, he was sometimes seized with strange and terrible thoughts as he sat brooding over the wreck of his love. He seemed to see, as in

a pale vision of flame and darkness, a little dusky Moorish boy bending to smell at a withered sprig of orange flower, and to remember that once—how long ago it seemed!—Claire had wished to kiss that boy as a Moorish woman might have kissed him. And then he saw a veiled figure, that he seemed to know even in its deceitful robe, bend down to the boy. And the vision faded. At another time he would hear the little tune that had persecuted him in the night. And then he recalled the music of Claire's dream, and the melody that charmed the snakes; and he shuddered. For the miracle man had never been seen in Tetuan since the day when Claire had watched him in the Soko. Nor could Renfrew ever find out whither he had wandered.

. . . . . .

Very long afterwards, however—although this fact was never known to Renfrew—two Russian travellers in the great Sahara Desert witnessed one evening, as they sat in their tent door, the performance of a savage charmer of snakes who carried upon his body three serpents—one striped, one black, and one white. And the younger of them noticed, and remarked to the other, that the charmer wore half-way up the little finger of his left hand a thin gold circle in which there was set a magnificent black pearl.